

THESIS



**A STRUCTURAL STUDY OF
BHABANI BHATTACHARYA'S
MAJOR NOVELS**

**ABSTRACT
THESIS**

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

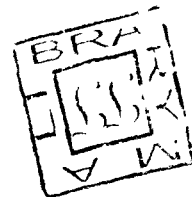
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IN

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BY

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ABSTRACT

If not amongst the very best Indo-Anglian novelists, Bhabani Bhattacharya cannot be dismissed as a minor writer nonetheless. He is certainly one of the crucial literary forces who have contributed in great measure to the development of Indian fiction in English. An eye witness to pre and post independent India, like many of his contemporaries he could catch his country's spiritual anguish, its predicaments, its aspirations its contradictions, its anxieties, its frustration and hopes. Thematically his fictional output does not claim to have broken new grounds, but, technically, he can be said to have established for himself a pride of place in Indian literature.

It is with the technical aspect of his fictional art that my research is basically concerned. My focus in particular has been on the study of the structure of his plots. Since plot can not be studied in isolation from other technical necessities like characterization, narrative devices, etc., these elements have also be treated.

A writer's literary ranking can best be gauged in terms of his exploitation of linguistic and technical resources. As a natural corollary to this, the study of the development of the

structure of the plot of fiction appears an inviting field for research. His technical artistry has not been uniformly successful through the six novels he has written, but, his innovative drive manifests itself in all of them.

His first novel, *So Many Hungers!*, was an immediate success. It was published soon after the independence. Its success owed, in a great measure, to the topicality of its theme. Its use of symbolism is a major feature of the novel. The theme of hunger is treated in its multitudinous aspects. No other Indo-Anglian fiction can provide a parallel to it with regard to the treatment of the theme on such a scale. Hunger in the novel relates to hunger for food; people's hunger for power and pelf; wife's hunger for the love of her husband; hunger for freedom; hunger for fame and what not. As is the case with many of his other novels, this novel too has poor people for some of its main characters. Like Mulk Raj Anand, the down-trodden has been Bhattacharya's one of the major concerns. The action of the novel is dramatic. It results from the tension between exploitative practises of the bureaucratic machinery and the rich traders on the one hand and poor innocent peasants on the other. It successfully integrates the main and the secondary plots to bring out the thematic concerns in a pronounced manner. The theme is expounded with

the development of plot. Its plot is time bound and events well defined. Time and structure of the ~~plot~~ are directly related.

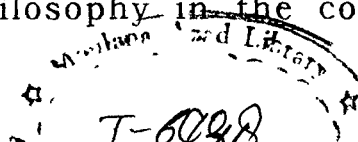
His next novel, *Music For Mohini* is essentially a novel of women. It embodies the writer's vision of the role a woman is likely to play in post independence India. The plot is concerned with the development of people's consciousness to imbibe the real meaning of freedom from foreign rule and increasing awareness of responsibilities. The novel seeks to juxtapose traditional and modern values. The conflict between them is finally resolved by proposing a healthy blend of the two which alone can ensure India's existence in the comity of nations in the fast changing world. It is set in Calcutta and a Bengali village of Behauli. The plot has all the essential material of an absorbing family drama, but, it is far from perfect as an artistic whole. Its design is casual. Many events and characters appear to be superfluous and remain unintegrated into the plot. The relationships between different characters remain unexplored. Certain characters could have been better developed. It does not have sufficient action which could elaborate the significance of the title. The novel is highly symbolic and symbolism operates at the levels of characters settings, themes, actions, etc.

He Who Rides a Tiger is a compelling novel of man's epic struggle against the unjust social equations existing in our society in the name of caste system. It is a story of Kalo's unwarranted suffering and his attempts at reversing the social equations. It is certainly the writer's masterpiece. It thoroughly exposes the baselessness of caste-hierarchy at the hands of the protagonist. Kalo's journey through different experiences of life has allegorical significance. His experiences at the physical level correspond with his experiences at the spiritual level. The novel allegorizes the triumph of human soul over corrupting influence of crass materialism. Kalo's characterization speaks volumes about Bhattacharya's artistic skills. Kalo appears both as an individual and a type. As an individual his character becomes timeless; and as type he becomes representative of his age. Its plot is compact. The action is largely time bound, though there are rare instances of the employment of the device of flash-back.

Bhattacharya's fourth novel *A Goddess named Gold* is rated as the one of the best novels on Indian village life. Technically, it has a major plot and a sub-plot and both are complementary to each other. The main plot relates to a young girl Meera's attempts at freeing her poor villagers from the iron-clutches of the village money lender; and the sub-plot is related

to amulet apirode. They both have been artistically integrated so as to convey the impression of a ^{single} narrative. The novel deals with the theme of economic liberation of the poor from exploitation. Its action is set around India's independence. Gold is the central symbol in the novel. It symbolizes material prosperity, spiritual and mental richness, etc. The touchstone signifies freedom which can work miracles if people do acts of real indness. Like his many other novels, the plot moves forward as a result of conflict between the exploiter and the exploited. It is a unified whole. It abides by the classical unities of place and action in a qualified sense, and the time duration covers a few months. The events are arranged in a logical sequence. The novel is a fine example of the writer's developed skills in handling technical devices.

His *Shadow from Ladakh* deals with the tradition-modernity theme in a more pronounced way than his earlier novels. It is greatly different from his other works in regard to the technique and stylistic features. It pleads for the synthesis of the modern values of the west and the traditional values of India to face the challenge of the changing times. Its structure can be studied in relation to its major characters. They all are seen to evolve a maturer perception of things. The work represents a serious attempt by the another to explore the viability of Gandhian philosophy in the context of post independence India.





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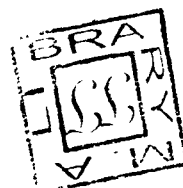
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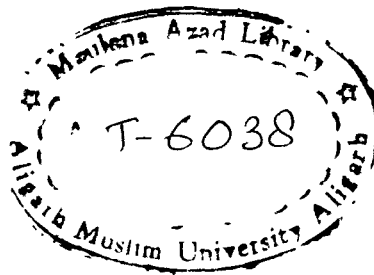
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2003

THESIS

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THESIS

Dedicated
to My
Parents

PREFACE

The extent of Bhabani Bhattacharya's popularity as a writer can be gauged from the fact that all his six novels and short stories have been translated into twenty six languages including sixteen European languages. He attracted the attention of critics with the publication of his first novel *So Many Hungers* ! Through the course of his literary career he has exhibited an increasing refinement of artistic sensibility and dexterity in handling technical devices. No wonder, he has been hailed by critics across the world. Scholars like K.R. Chandrasekhran, K.K. Sharma, D.B. Shimmer, R.K. Srivastava, Srinivasa Iyengar, C.D. Narasimiah, Meenakshi Mukherjee, H.M. Williams, R.S. Singh etc. have made significant contributions towards the study of his works.

Though many in-depth studies have been made of Bhattacharya's fiction, the structural aspect remains relatively unexplored. This thesis is an attempt at exploring the structure of his major novels to gain a wider understanding of his craftsmanship.

I express my deep sense of gratitude to my esteemed teacher, Prof. Iqbal Ahmed, Department of English, A.M.U., Aligarh, for his emotional support and encouragement during the course of the work. I am

also thankful to my friend Dr. Aleem Salman, Lecturer, Department of English, A.M.U., Aligarh, for his invaluable suggestions which have helped me complete the work earlier than usual.

Thanks are also due to Mr. Mashkoor Khan for computer processing and painstaking efforts at coming to terms with the manuscript.

I again take this opportunity to express my deep sense of obligation to the staff of Maulana Azad Library, A.M.U., and Seminar Library of Department of English, A.M.U., Aligarh, for their kind cooperation in making desired material available.

Mohd Qaiser Khan
(Mohd. Qaiser Khan)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. A Brief Biographical Sketch:

Bhabani Bhattacharya was born on 10th November, 1906, in Bhagalpur, Bihar. He exhibited signs of intellectual brilliance when he contributed an article to the Bengali magazine *Mouchak* at the young age of twelve. His talents were nurtured by his grandfather in his childhood. His father Promotho Bhattacharya, who wanted him to become a government servant, did not appreciate his flair for writing. At the age of nineteen his poem was selected for Tagore's *Chayanika*.

Bhattacharya was educated at Patna University and graduated with Honours in English Literature in 1927. After graduation he left for London for higher studies. He was interested in pursuing studies in English Literature at King's College, University of London, but was advised to study History. He got the Bachelor's degree with Honours in History and then completed Ph.D. on historical research in 1934. He pursued his literary interests during his stay in London (1927 –

1934), and published a small book entitled *The Goden Boat* in 1932, which contained English translation of some of Tagore's poems by him. He married Salila Mukherji in 1935 and was blessed with a son and two daughters.

He had no liking for any government job. He was interested in his literary activities and wanted to become a writer. His wife, who was a good short-story writer, helped him greatly in pursuing his literary interests. His decision to write in English was made after serious considerations. On choosing English as a medium of writing he says:

I have loved writing in English. The creative writer must have full freedom to use the language of his choice. If he decides on a foreign language, he will have to cross immense technical hurdles, but that is his headache. I have enjoyed the challenge of this literary problem- expressing Indian life in the idioms of an alien language.¹

In 1944 he published *Indian Cavalcade*, a collection of many articles on Indian history. The book was an important achievement in his creative career. It sought to deal with historical personalities

within the framework of imaginative short-stories. In 1947 his first novel, *So Many Hungers!* saw the light of the day and established his literary credentials.

He worked as Press Attache at the Indian Embassy in Washington D. C. in 1949, and in the following year became the Assistant Editor of 'The Illustrated Weekly of India'. He held the post of Secretary of Tagore Commemorative Society, New Delhi in 1959-60. He was appointed as consultant in the Ministry of Education, New Delhi in 1961 where he worked till 1967. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in the same year for his *novel Shadow From Ladakh*. He received a Ford Foundation grant in 1968-69 to write a book on Gandhiji entitled *Gandhi the Writer - The Image as It Grew* on the occasion of the birth centenary of the Mahatma. He was also a member of the Advisory Board of the Sahitya Akademi. He worked as a senior specialist at East-West Centre, Honolulu during 1969-70, and in 1970 became a visiting professor in the University of Hawaii, Honolulu. Bhabani Bhattacharya was a widely travelled man. In 1951 he visited the U. S. S. R. with the first Indian cultural delegation of writers and scientists. He attended the International Conference of writers at Stockholm. He participated in the Harvard International

Seminar at Massachusetts in 1959, and in the following year he went to Tokyo as a delegate to participate in a similar seminar. During 1962-63 he gave lectures as a state guest in New Zealand, Australia and Germany. He also attended a writers' conference in Adelaide during the Festival of Arts in Australia. His literary distinction was recognized by the universities of New Zealand. He died in 1985.

Bhabani Bhattacharya is among the major Indian novelists writing in English. His literary fame is not confined to India alone. His books have been translated into twenty six languages, including sixteen European languages. He is the fourth writer to beg the Sahitya Akademi Award preceded by R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Verrier Elwin. His novels present a realistic picture of his motherland. They have a special social purpose in view. His attitude towards life is positive. He considers art to be a criticism of life which examines prevailing values, attitudes, orientation of society. He views the novel as an "idiom of compassion" aimed at rectifying the social ills. They are rooted in Indian historical settings and address basic problems besetting the country. They advocate a programme of reforms and also constitute criticism of retrogressive values.

His extensive travels and experience around the world help him discover in humanity an underlying unity. We cannot help identifying ourselves with his characters and their situations in his novels and short stories. His style successfully captures the spirit of Indian life. His idiom is well suited to his subject and theme. He thinks that Indian writings in English have done a great service in balancing the distorted picture of India given by foreign writers who could not grasp the true meaning of Indian ethos and were unable to fathom the depths of our spirit. L. N. Gupta writes:

Pure intellectuals watch the crowds but do not force themselves on them. They visit slums and absorb the misery of their dwellers in their being. They tour the famine stricken areas. They look into the shrivelled faces and sunken eyes of the sufferers. They share their distress. But they do not use amplifiers to blare their benefaction. They suffer quietly. The process involves cycles of seething tensions. The end product is a major work, say, a great novel in the case of a fiction writer. It is a monument of

its times. Such is the case with Bhabani
Bhattacharya.²

His first novel *So Many Hungers!* was published in 1947. It deals with some crucial topical issues. It is a critique of the British Government, its failure to prevent the disastrous consequences of the Bengal famine in 1943. It presents the precarious condition of India in general and Bengal in particular during the Second World War due to imminent threat of Japanese aggression. It is a denunciation of man's inhumanity to man. It also dramatizes greatness of human spirit caught in the throes of starvation and exploitation.

His second novel, *Music For Mohini*, was published in 1952. It presents the clash between the traditional and the modern values. It proposes the idea of synthesis of positive aspects of the two sets of values. It presents the pageantry of Indian life.

He Who Rides a Tiger, published in 1954, is arguably his masterpiece. Like his preceding novels it is set in the rural Bengal and the city of Calcutta. It is also written against the backdrop of the evil consequences of Bengal famine. It treats those issues which constitute a serious threat to India's progress. Issues like poverty, casteism, exploitation, political corruption, etc. are dealt with in this novel.

His fourth novel, *A Goddess Named Gold*, was written in 1960. It is considered as the best novel on the rural life of India. It satirizes people's greed for gold. It describes how sincere acts of kindness can be abused by selfish people. It is a masterly display of the device of irony.

Shadow from Ladakh, his fifth novel, came in 1967. Against the background of Indo-China conflict, it raises a most urgent question about what path should India choose for survival-- should it adopt Gandhian ethics or should it opt for heavy industrialization. It finally advocates a fusion of the two.

His sixth novel, *A Dream in Hawaii*, was written in 1970. It projects the view that the fulfilment in life can be possible only through the blending of the spiritualism of the East and the materialism of the West. Unlike his other novels, this novel is set abroad -- in the island of Hawaii.

Apart from the novels, Bhattacharya has written fifteen short-stories. These stories present multiple aspects of Indian life. In them he explores the subtleties of human emotions and psychologically analyzes human nature. His final work, *Socio-Political currents in*

Bengal: A Nineteenth Century Perspective, is of historical value. It is a history of Bengal in the nineteenth century.

2. Formative Influences:

No creative writer can afford to be safely ensconced in the seclusion of his study impervious to the intellectual developments outside his creative acrobatics. Bhattacharya is no exception to this rule. He is as much a product of certain formative influences as his innate sensibilities. He has been receptive to ideas from home and abroad. The list of foreign writers who have influenced him contains some celebrated names like Ibsen, G. B. Shaw, Romain Rolland, Walt Whitman, John Steinbeck, Sinclair Lewis, etc. D. B. Shimer observes:

... new horizons were opened by some of the greatest writers of the west.. Romain Rolland's *Jean Christophe* 'overwhelmed' him, and Bernard Shaw began to influence him. There was also the invigorating literature of Norway-- the works of Ibsen, Hamsun and Johan Bojer. A favourite American author at that time was

Walt Whitman, who would be followed later by such socially aware writers of the twentieth century as John Steinbeck, Sinclair Lewis, John dos Passos, Upton Sinclair, etc. And there would be Alan Paton, one of his favourites, whose books on Africa were, like his own, written from a base of social concern.³

Among the Indian writers to influence him the most is Rabindra Nath Tagore. Tagore has held his attention since his teens. Under his influence he wrote short poems and pieces of prose in Bengali when he was a child. They appeared in children's magazine *Mouchak*. He also wrote many articles which were published in a Bengali magazine *Vichitra*. With regard to Tagore's influence on him, Bhattacharya says:

Whoever came in contact with the personality of Rabindranath Tagore, even for a brief space, received one predominating impression-- that of richness. It was a richness of the spirit and was not limited to genius. There was the super charm softening, the intellectual blaze, the

innate simpleness belying the sophistication;
 but above all, the never failing humanity with
 which the poet made his forceful impact on all
 levels of consciousness.⁴

Tagore's influence is reflected in Bhattacharya's novels. Tagore's views about integration of cultures, universalism, underlying unity of mankind find artistic expression in his works. His *Shadow from Ladakh* bears the imprint of Tagore's ideas:

That was Tagore's firm belief. Integration-- that
 was the poet's life long quest: integration of the
 simple and the sophisticated; the ancient and
 the modern; city and village; East and West.⁵

He has treated at length many of Tagore's ideas like the idea of fusion of diverse elements, values and his concept of aesthetics. *Music For Mohini* deals with these views of Tagore.

The second great influence on Bhattacharya is Mahatma Gandhi. His first meeting with the great leader dates back to 1931 when Gandhiji went to London to attend the Round Table Conference. The meeting left lingering memories in Bhattacharya about the greatness of Gandhiji. He acknowledges his influence to D. B. Shimer.

India's struggle for freedom had reached one of its peak points. I had been close to that struggle, though not an activist. In India I attended many meetings in which Gandhi spoke. But this was my first encounter with the great man, it was only a little less overwhelming than the one with Tagore.⁶

The influence of Gandhiji is easily discernable in almost all his novels. Bhattacharya's sympathetic treatment of the country people, the down-trodden and the outcast bears Gandhian impact on his creative sensibilities. In fact, he has created many important characters who embody Gandhian ideals of truth, non-violence, love for common man and the spirit of self-denial. The character of Satyajit in *Shadow From Ladakh*; the old minstrel in *A Goddess Named Gold*; Devish in *So Many Hungers!*; Jayadev in *Music For Mohini* are living symbols of Gandhian philosophy. Similarly, Bhattacharya adopts Gandhian attitude while treating the themes of freedom struggle corruption, economic exploitation, casteism, ignorance, poverty, self-sacrifice, etc. His Sahitya Academy Award winning novel, *Shadow From Ladakh*, is basically focussed on the theme of

Gandhism versus Industrialism. The reconciliation between the two opposite philosophies is possible due to the inherent goodness of human heart as is manifest in the characters of Bhaskar and Satyajit. Satyajit's character is modelled along Gandhian ideals, but he finally perceives the necessity of adjustment with the opposite point of view. This should not be interpreted as non-viability of Gandhism in today's world, but on the contrary, it serves to highlight the value of adjustment as something inevitable. The adjustment alone can warrant healthy all-round progress of a value-based civilization.

Gandhiji's deep influence on him is testified to by the two books written by him on the father of the nation. *Gandhiji the Writer* (1969) and *Mahatma Gandhi* (1977) explain Gandhiji's political, social and philosophical views. These books also describe Gandhian influence on many other writers of the twentieth century:

Inspired by him, they turned towards the depiction of the life of the common man, the poor and the illiterate, particularly in the villages. Their prose style became less ornamental, less designed for the highbrow scholar... There was a reaction against obsolete

values. The writer drew largely on life for their theme and new horizons opened up before them.⁷

Two important stylistic qualities of Gandhiji's prose-- lucidity and directness-- are unmistakably present in Bhattacharya's style.

Another significant formative influence on Bhattacharya is Jawaharlal Nehru. There are many references to him in connection with the treatment of the freedom movement in his novels. In *A Goddess Named Gold* Nehru's speech is mentioned while elaborating the symbolic significance of the theme:

A touchstone that was freedom's gift for the people. That was what Nehru had meant, his language more direct "India discovers herself again," he had said. Are we brave enough to accept the challenge of the future? ⁸

Nehruvian view on industrialization and material progress are discussed in *Shadow From Ladakh*.

John Steinbeck also influenced Bhattacharya a great deal. Steinbeck's preoccupation with human affairs, the plight of the common man, justice, satire, humour, etc. are noticeable in his art also. *So Many Hungers!* and

He Who Rides a Tiger drew largely on Steinbeck with regard to their thematic concerns. They present social injustice which is the lot of the poor common man in a caste-ridden society. Bhattacharya's art of tempering irony with mild satire as displayed in the amulet episode in *A Goddess Named Gold* is inspired by Steinbeck's style. In many of his short stories Bhattacharya employs the technique of irony.

While studying in London, Bhattacharya came under the influence of many intellectual forces. Lila Ray observes:

He joined the Junior P. E. N. Club in London and associated himself with the progressive movements of the time. He was an anti-Fascist.⁹

His association with the leftist writers of England exposed him to the Marxist philosophy and developed in him sympathy for the working-class and he became the champion of the cause of the exploited section of society. He was determined to launch a crusade against casteism and social injustice. These ideas find artistic expression in his novels like *So Many Hungers!*; *He Who Rides a Tiger* and *A Goddess Named Gold*.

All Bhattacharya's novels and short stories are expressive of his reaction to some social irritants. In other words, he could not help being

moved by the prevailing social, political, economic conditions in the country. The famine of 1943 which swept across the province of Bengal and its avoidable disastrous fallouts moved the artist in him to such an extent that he was compelled to treat the event in varying degrees in many of his works. He himself admits the impact of the famine on him:

The great famine swept down upon Bengal. The emotional stirrings I felt (more than two million men, women and children died of slow starvation amid a man-made scarcity) were a sheer compulsion of creativity. The result was the novel *So Many Hungers!*¹⁰

The global developments like the fight for political freedom by many colonies against imperial powers; the democracy euphoria; the demands for liberty, equality and brotherhood provided him with a creative impulse. Thus he was equally influenced by the events taking place across the world. His keen sensitivity to changes around him greatly conditioned his art. His art is realistic and concerned with issues directly related to people. Another distinguishing feature of his art is his penchant for the analysis of historical forces at work which are

instrumental in the continuation of social evils or in catalyzing social changes.

After achieving independence India was faced with a crucial question-- must it follow its age-old traditions or must it adopt the ways of the materialistic civilization of the West? Bhattacharya's deep understanding of Indian ethos and insights into certain weaknesses of the Western culture helped him propose a constructive fusion of the best of the two civilizations. He pleads for a scientific orientation of Indian society.

3. Bhattacharya's concept of Fiction:

Bhattacharya is a realist with a social purpose. In his fiction he has amply proved his ability to reconcile demands of art with his sense of social commitment. He is an advocate of the idea of "art for life's sake." Any work without social purpose is thoroughly meaningless to him. He says:

Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature which is much in vogue does not appear to me a sound judgement.¹¹

He maintains that creative literature should be instructive to the reader without being didactic and pedantic. He thinks that a genuine work of literature deals with themes related to human miseries and predicament.

He opines that it is possible to produce a work of fiction based on the contemporary events and conditions, though it may appear to some that current happenings incapacitate the writer to adopt objective stance on account of their immediacy. He earnestly feels that such events alone can furnish the raw-material to create a work of art. The writer's sharp sensibility is more alive to them. He writes:

It has been argued that the novelist should not draw his material from contemporary reality, since he is too close to it to be able to read its meaning and assess its inward nature. This is absurd.¹²

This view about the viability of contemporary events as suitable material for fictional writing is again stated by him when he says, "The history need not wait for fifty years before it is declared suitable for fictional projection."¹³

He is not against the treatment of sex in fiction. He considers sex an inseparable part of life, and since art is basically related to the revelation of the truth of life, its omission will tantamount to an incomplete portrayal of the realities of life. But, he is averse to direct treatment of sex in the novel. He wants it to be treated in a suggestive manner to acquire artistic value:

This flow of cheap paperback, vulgar, low-taste books revelling in sex description cannot be welcomed. I have a revulsion for them. But look at Lawrence. He creates a whole world of this much tabooed feeling and yet the descriptions are most beautiful and excel in their lyrical quality.¹⁴

Bhattacharya has liberal views about techniques employed in fiction. As far as his art is concerned, it is fundamentally conventional in terms of techniques, but he does not oppose new techniques of fiction by other writers. According to him, a writer is free to choose any style that suits his theme and talents. With regard to language he again gives full liberty to a writer to choose any medium of expression in which he is most comfortable.

His views on the creative process are akin to those of the Romantics. In his opinion, a work of art is spontaneous in nature. It is produced when a writer feels a strong creative urge. Often characters develop independent of the writer's preconceived design and this holds true for the entire plan of a work of art. Bhattacharya says:

But, when I start writing, it is not I, but characters and situations that compel me to be led by them. It is they who should decide the way they should end. The end of the story, in my case, is never the one which I had in my mind in the beginning.¹⁵

4. Place of Bhattacharya in Indo-Anglian Fiction:

The international recognition accorded to Indo-Anglian literature is indicative of the success achieved by the Indian writers who have expressed Indian sensibilities in a medium foreign to the ethos of Indian soil. Though Bhattacharya is not among the foremost fiction writers, yet, he has made a distinct name in Indo-Anglian fiction for himself. He occupies an intermediate position between the Big Three-- R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao on the one hand, and Nayantra

Sehgal, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala on the other. Unlike many other writers of the twentieth century, he is a socially committed artist. It accounts for his persistent concern with the themes of poverty, exploitation, hunger, suffering, casteism, East-West encounter, etc. He is a progressive writer who is keen on bringing about a change in the thinking and attitude of the people to help them face the challenge of the changing times.

Hunger has been a persistent thematic concern of Bhattacharya. He treats it in its multitudinous dimensions. No other Anglo-Indian writer has presented human tragedy on such a scale and with such an insight as does Bhattacharya. Mulk Raj Anand and Kamala Markandaya deal with the theme of hunger in their novels like *Coolie*, *Untouchable*, *Nectar in a Sieve* and *A Handful of Rice*, but none of them can excel Bhattacharya's treatment of it in its varied aspects. His famous novel, *So Many Hungers!* is a fine work of literature which bears the writer's deep observation of Indian society. In the novel hunger is treated in its varied aspects -- of starvation of people, their hunger for money, their hunger for sex, their hunger for power, for recognition, for fame, wife's hunger for the love of her husband, women's hunger, social freedom, and so on.

Many Indo-Anglian novelists have portrayed life in Indian villages. They have set their novels in rural India for the simple reason that villages constitute more than seventy percent of Indian social life and can provide more meaningful view of India. K. S. Venkataraman's *Kandan the Patriot* and *Murugan the Tiller*, Mulk Raj Anand's *The Old Man and the Cow* and *The Village* are some novels treating the lives of the poor villagers on a substantial scale. The novels of Bhattacharya are by and large set in different villages of Bengal and concerned with the clash of urban and rural values. The vision of the novelist finally emerging at the end is one of healthy synthesis between positive aspects of the urban and the rural. *The Goddess Named Gold* is one of the finest novels on Indian village life to come in years.

The theme of conflict between tradition and modernity is another important thematic concern of Bhattacharya's fiction. His *Music for Mohini* deals with this theme and finally presents a reconciliation between tradition and modernity.

The theme of Indian independence has always attracted Indo-Anglian writers. Khwaja Ahmad Abbas in *Inquilab*, Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* and *I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale* and Magaonkar's in *A Bend in the Ganges* have treated the theme of Indian

independence and the horrors of partition. But these novels do not explore the depth of human emotions the way Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* and *He Who Rides the Tiger* do. He is a past master of the art of portraying human emotions to a nicety. Be it the anguish of a tormented soul, or a feeling of rootlessness, or an aspiration for country's freedom, or a sense of defeat or exultation, very few Indo-Anglian writers can hope to match Bhattacharya's penmanship in delineating them. Normally not much action in his novels takes place on a physical level. It is in the minds of the characters that the action unfurls itself. This can be noted in *Shadow From Ladakh*. In the progress of the action Bhattacharya displays an uncanny mastery in fusing together intellectual dialectics and emotional depths. Bhattacharya is at home in painting every conceivable shade of human emotions. He superbly handles the romantic relationship between Sunita and Bhaskar, a wife's emotional starvation in Mohini's character, Kajoli's spirit of sacrifice, Meera's all consuming concern for the poor. Such varied tones of emotions are missing in Mulk Raj Anand or Khushwant Singh.

Bhattacharya is a realist and his characters and their situations are taken from life. He does not indulge in metaphysical abstractions like Raja Rao, nor does he exercise comic imagination of R. K. Narayan, nor

does he dabble in pornographic descriptions like Khushwant Singh. He presents both the rural and the urban sides of India. His treatment of life is deep, with a measure of pathos reminding us of Charles Dickens. He draws his characters from different sections of society. An important fact about his novels is that he is concerned with an individual's possibility of success in life. His social commitment is not towards the economic well being of society alone, he is also keen to intellectually change the social structure.

Notwithstanding an indelible influence of Tagore, Bhattacharya's novels are quite different from the works of the great Bengali writer. A writer of Bhattacharya's vision is highly optimistic in striking contrast to Tagore. His novels envisage a bright future for India inspite of many contradictions in its social fabric. He is convinced of the possibility of resolution of many of its inherent contradictions with the passage of time. His characters display uncommon resilience in the face of the most adverse of circumstances. They strive against all odds to overhaul the social structure itself.

Bhattacharya's world wide fame as a writer owes in a large measure to his style. His language is equally alive to the Indian ethos and responsive to stylistic expedients of English language. Like many

established Indo-Anglian writers he successfully exploits the language to serve his artistic requirements. His language carries a distinctive flavour of Indianness. R. K. Narayan writes in a very simple English and does not experiment with style, Raja Rao breaks the English syntax to adapt it to his requirements, and Bhattacharya coins new words and translates Indian phrases, proverbs, idioms into English to express Indian sensibility. Bhattacharya employs them in the dialogues. He comes out successful in conveying the real spirit of the Indian society through a foreign medium. He is a master of simple and smooth style without any pretensions to sublimity. He is capable of expressing what he wants to. He says:

Indian writing in English has been a decisive factor in redressing false presentation by foreign story tellers who, with their limited possibilities of true experience, have seen only the surface of our way of life, failing to reach deeper into our spirit.¹⁶

Bhattacharya's plots are well constructed in most of the novels. This he accomplishes despite being tentative in planning his novels. One characteristic feature of his plots is that they observe time-space

relationship and proceed in a logical sequence. As a writer he maintains a distance from his art, a feat much applauded by T. S. Eliot in his famous essay, 'Tradition and Individual Talent' Malta Grover observes:

It is surprising that Bhattacharya's plots have come out so well when he himself has confessed that he seldom planned his stories in advance. They grew in his subconscious till he felt compelled to express them. But he is following the modern tradition in keeping his own personality out, and at the same time retaining the older tradition of expounding the theme in logical time bound plot, with a few exceptions.¹⁷

His art of female characterization scores over that of male characterization. His female characters, generally speaking, though idealistically drawn, appear convincing in many respects. They occupy major positions in the plots of the novels. Their appeal lies in their individuality and they also attain symbolic significance. They act and behave not as automatons but as thinking individuals who can comprehend the demands of their situations.

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CHAPTER II

SO MANY HUNGERS! (1947)

So Many Hungers! announced Bhattacharya's emergence on the literary scene and soon convinced the critic and the reader alike about his tremendous potentialities as a novelist. This novel is built around contemporary but crucial developments in Indian life. Against the backdrop of Bengal famine of 1943 and second world war the writer unfolds a human drama of immense magnitude. It brings under focus the paradox of life as seen in characters, situations and the general drama of existence. The characters are sketched with a measure of indulgence characteristic of his art of fiction.

The novel depicts harrowing scenes of stark poverty, wretchedness of humble people of Bengal countryside in the wake of famine whose disastrous effects were essentially due to the machinations of profit making leaders and business-men.

The plot of the novel has two main strands pertaining to the Basu family in Calcutta and Kajoli's family domiciled in Baruni, a village in Bengal. The strand developed around the Basu family is marked by in-

built tensions. Except for its two members – Rahoul and his grandfather, Devata, all others exhibit difference in attitudes, perceptions and opinions.

Devesh Babu, popularly known as Devata, is the eldest member of the Basu family. He is in his seventies, a true Gandhian and an active participant in the freedom movement. His idealism is at the root of his decision to live in a village where he is greatly adored. He identifies himself with the poor villagers and personally exemplifies the Gandhian ideal of simple living and high thinking. His son, Samarendra Basu, is his opposite in many ways. Unlike Devata, Samarendra is a man of the world with ever-increasing greed for money. He gives importance to the acquisition of wealth and status that comes with toeing the line of the British rulers. Rahoul, Samarendra's eldest son, does not view with favour his father's inhuman ways to make fast money in the period of famine and world war II.

Rahoul echoes Devata's many qualities. He is all sympathy for the cause of the freedom movement. He is a scientist but deeply steeped in moral values. His sincere attempts at helping the starving people in Calcutta testify to his moral commitments. His running a free-kitchen for the deprived masses is no insignificant act of heroism.

Kunal, another member of this family, is Rahoul's younger brother. He is not an idealist. He is eager to serve in the army under the British not out of sympathy but for the sheer thrill of it, to serve himself, to find an outlet for his spirit. He is no intellectual but values serving a fellow human-being as the noblest act of man. He relinquishes his post his father had obtained for him through his manipulative skills. He makes this sacrifice to help some genuinely needy person. He is full of enthusiasm to prove to the foreign rulers the resilience, resourcefulness, and bravery of the Indians.

Rahoul's mother and his wife, Manju, are two female members of the family. The mother is past her prime, rich in worldly wisdom, having faith in superstitious and age-old traditions. When the news of the World War II breaks upon her, she is anxious to "buy rice and mustard oil, a half year's supply, before the grocer has an inkling."¹ Manju, on the other hand, is no practical and wise. She is not well initiated into domestic chores. She is modern in her attitude in the sense that she likes to visit hotels and dance. In short, she is a woman without deep appreciation of the realities of life. The Basu family presents a curious mix of the tradition and the modern.

Kajoli's family in Baruni constitute the novel's second strand. Here again the novelist presents a blend of the traditional and the modern aspects of Indian life. The novelist's concern with the age-old Indian tradition of unification of diverse elements in Indian life is manifest. His fiction enshrines "the essential Indian ideal of unity in diversity resulting from the compromise between the various aspects of life."²

He is convinced that the question of India's progress and stability can best be addressed through a synthesis of different elements. This belief is the basic shaping principle of his novel's content and structure. Just as D. H. Lawrence's novels express his idea of vitalistic response towards life, Bhattacharya's novels explicitly convey the idea of compromise.

The main focus of Kajoli's family is Kajoli herself. She is a young girl of common lot, not highly educated, with country-bred manners. She has a younger brother, Onu; a mother; a father who has been taken away to jail for his involvement in the freedom struggle and an elder brother, Kanu, who too has been jailed for burning a local post office which is believed to be a symbol of white man's domination over the Indians. Between Devata and Kajoli's house a harmonious relationship exists. He is their synpathiser, guide, friend and godfather. He is affectionately

called Dadu.” Like Dadu, Kishore is another outsider from Calcutta who develops a strong bond with Kajoli’s family. He falls in love with Kajoli and marries her. Theirs is a happy union based on mutual understanding. Their relationship represents the blending of the urban and the rural, the traditional and the modern values. Kishore is a native of Calcutta. He is young, educated and cosmopolitan in attitude. He worked in a cotton mill in Calcutta and had been a labour leader there. He had served five months imprisonment for his leading an agitation against the mill authorities. He is completely alien to the country-ways. He meets a pre-mature end after being hit by a bullet.

So many Hungers! has a contemporary contextual framework as is the case with Bhattacharya’s other novels. Set in the great famine of 1943, it introduces the early years of World War II, the Quit India Movement and the mass struggle for country’s freedom from foreign yoke. Both the strands of the plot of the novel have these various developments woven into them. The two- dimensional plot serves to underline the writer’s persistent concern with the idea of fusion of diverse elements – those of modernity and tradition; urban and rural; materialism and spiritualism. It presents a vivid picture of the wretchedness of poor peasantry and country folk of Bengal. To quote:

While the hoarders, profiteers and black-marketeers plied a thundering trade, the wells of human pity seemed to have almost dried up, and only the jackals and vultures were in vigorous and jubilant action.³

The title of the book signifies human hunger in its different aspects. It is hunger for food, hunger for freedom, hunger for hearth, hunger for fame, hunger for sex, maternal hunger for a child, paternal hunger for the welfare of the family, etc. But the hunger for food is the predominant ideational concern of the novel. The scenes expressive of this idea are the most powerful of all the other scenes. K. R. Chandrasekhran opines:

Bhattacharya is at his best when he depicts the plight of the ruined peasants, their exodus to the city and their abject misery and degradation.⁴

The tragic story of Kajoli's family is reflective of the fate of lacs of men and women of Bengal who were the victims of man-made famine and atrocities of a foreign government. It is through her family's harrowing experiences that the main theme of the novel is dealt with. Technically, her family's strand in the plot is more significant than the

one involving the Basu family in Calcutta. The Basu family may represent any hunger, but not hunger for food.

So many Hungers! explores the theme of growth of human soul which gives it universality of appeal. It opens with Rahouls's indecisiveness and lack of freedom to act independently. He is unable to make a choice between materialistic ways of his father, Samrendra, and the life of exemplary righteousness of his grandfather, Devata. He is torn between the pulls of worldly fulfillment and denial which every sensible man experiences at a certain stage in his life. When the war breaks out he is compelled to make a choice rendered more difficult by his divided self. It is a war between the democratic ideals and the fascist's subversion of the basic human rights. Participation in the war means strengthening the hands of the British and thus becoming instrumental in the perpetuation of an alien rule. And non-participation implies callousness towards human rights in the establishment of a fascist regime. He is reminded of his friends in England who had gone to Spain "undeterred by the work they loved, acting on the passion of the soul."⁵ His younger brother, Kunal, joins the army but he is unable to decide whether or not to support the British. His indecisiveness has been presented very poignantly as is evident in the following passage:

War was mass murder, you could commit
 yourself to mass murder with a clear conscience
 only when you are convinced that you would
 be riddling the world of some pest. In the name
 of humanity Kunal and others of his generation
 were called upon to fight the pest in Europe.
 But the champions of freedom were the eaters
 of freedom in this land.⁶

Rahoul's inner conflict is very artistically externalized by the birth of his daughter and the war, the former symbolizes the creative instincts in man. It brings home the point that creation is only possible amidst destruction. For the writer the war assumes the hideous meaning of exploitation of the poor by the rich and scheming business-men who have hoarded essential food items in their godowns after buying them cheap and waiting to sell them dear at more than five times their normal rates⁷. The war increases the momentum of the villagers' exodus. It again appears in its sheer cruel aspect when animals and scavengers feed on the dying bodies of people stranded on the road on their journey to Calcutta.

Samarendra's materialism and Devesh's spiritualism are the logical corollaries of their respective perceptions of life. Samerendra is

the man of the world; he is practical and views things with the eyes of a calculating profit-oriented man. For him he and his family considerations are of paramount importance. His manipulations are “all for his sons’ sake... Rahoul, Kunal. They would be shielded from those burning worries he had known in the hateful years of struggle and pain.”⁸

Devesh’s life is governed by Gandhian ideals. He is one with the masses and exhibits his philosophy of life of non-violence in most trying situations. But Rahoul is unable to make his choice between the ways of his father and grandfather. He is a dedicated research-scientist who enjoys his work, loves his wife, relishes good food, entertains himself with good music. He discovers the obvious contradiction between his normal peaceful life of ease and respectability and his love for India’s freedom.

Rahoul gradually resolves this contradiction. He becomes aware of the disastrous consequences of the war for his countrymen. He feels for those poor who come to Calcutta from far-off villages. They are “all people, with minds, with the capacity to feel.”⁹ He is moved by the destruction of human values and the dislocation and disintegration of families. He sees “the woman who wants to bury her child to save it from

constant pangs of hunger”¹⁰ He also observes “the woman who sells her six-year old daughter only to be forced into prostitution.”¹¹

But the goodness in poor people asserts itself again and again. They rise to deeds of heroic self-denial and the greatness of their acts leave us admiring them. Incidents like a mother’s parting with her cow to help another starving woman, Onu’s sharing of figs with the other children of the village, and the destitutes’ sharing of the left-over from dust-bins with others equally needy are some acts of true heroism. The sight of the poor girl baring herself to earn money from alien soldiers in order to feed other poor people and children moves Rahoul. When a destitute pregnant woman dies near his house, he is a totally changed man. The harrowing have been described very succinctly. To quote:

The destitute woman was revealed in her human context. Not a pauper ever whining for morsels, hanging on to a deathly life without meaning. A young expectant mother about to make life and denied, cast out in the street, till at last she could not bear the struggle...¹²

His choice comes from a realistic and deeper perception of life. Like his grandfather he rises above petty personal considerations, and

thinks for the people of his country. He becomes a part of the great upsurge against the alien rulers. He is ennobled by the sufferings of others. He registers personal development spiritually, intellectually and emotionally. He is a pillar for the future reconstruction of free India. His character has structural value for the novel; without him the first strand of the plot would lose its distinctive form and reduced to bare skeleton. He represents man's quality to transcend the superficial trappings of social recognition and fake comforts of domestic life. He addresses himself to some fundamental questions of life which relate to the well being of his country and his poor country men. In Indo-Anglian fiction he is, in a sense, a stereotype of Guatam Buddha.

The novel is a great literary piece not so much because of its treatment of contemporary problem of immense gravity for a nation caught in a dilemma but because of its portrayal of the triumph of human soul against the heaviest odds. Kajoli's final decision to earn an honest living and Samarendra Basu's eventual perception of the meaninglessness of titles and wealth indicate the victory of truth over falsehood.

Kajoli is a major female character. She is a typical Indian woman embodying many womanly qualities. She is shown to be a good daughter,

loving wife, caring sister, an adept housewife and she bears her sufferings courageously. She is not bogged down by her dislocation from her roots, and cruel fate. When hard-pressed by the circumstances, her choice of a disrespectful living is made to support her ailing mother and a famished brother, but she immediately asserts her dignity and nobility by renouncing the dubious way of the procuress. She decides to eke out a respectful living by selling newspapers as she is greatly inspired by the reported exhortations of Devata to his countrymen to be brave. Devata's role in the novel, though not large with regard to his appearance on the pages, is structurally very important. He provides a link of continuity between the two strands of the plot and fashions the conclusion of the novel in absentia. He moves the plot and conditions the development of major characters like Rahoul and Kajoli. Kajoli's final decision to opt for a noble living underlines the main thematic concern of the greatness of human soul amidst moral chaos. Rahoul's supreme sacrifice is also the result of Devata's sobering influence. Devata is a structural necessity for the plot. He has a direct bearing on the artistic treatment of the theme. He exhorts people to refrain from selling their rice to agents of the government. He tries hard to minimize harmful effects of war on the poor. He knows that the war is an opportunity for the unscrupulous men

to make quick money through unfair means. Baruni becomes one of the centres of Gandhian agitation due to his hard work to create political awareness. His parallel can be found in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* in the character of Moorthy. They both stand against the economic exploitation of the poor people by the alien rulers. It is Devata who has initiated Kajol into the Gandhian philosophy and prepared her to conduct herself with dignity and nobility of spirit in times of adversity. She is Bhattacharya's major character to convey the central thematic concern of the novel. It is no gainsaying the fact that Devata has a significant role to move the plot of the novel and condition the development of its structure. Similarly, Rahoul's later acts of charity and his identifying himself with the lot of the masses owe largely to the spiritually replenishing influence of his grandfather. Both the strands of the plot mutually strengthen each other's effectiveness in treating the theme. They combine to impress us with a sense of tragedy of human situation.

The two strands are linked by the event of war. Both Calcutta and Baruni, places associated with the Basu family and Kajoli's family, suffer the scars of war in terms of the exploitation and deprivation of people. A full-scale tragedy of human life is enacted in these places. The scenes in the novel keep shifting from one place to another. This device is

structurally very crucial. The shifting of the scenes contribute to the tragic effects. Such events as scorching of country boats to impede Japanese advance, the starvation of the villagers, the exodus to Calcutta, the countless deaths of starvation on the streets of that wonder city, the mass upheaval there, etc. leave us with a sense of devastation that was a reality across the province of Bengal. The plot of the novel does not suffer on account of such shifting of scenes and the complication of events; they make the narrative highly absorbing.

Various events during the war serve to present the novelist's criticism of the erosion of human values. Amidst prevailing chaos the nobility of human soul asserts time and again. It rises above narrow considerations of personal gain or loss. The author presents people of virtually every age whose heroism stands out distinctly in scene after scene. These scenes have been presented with the warmth of human touch. Though the focus of the novel is on individuals, these events present a context of indisputable historicity. Artistically speaking, the elements of political realism and literary narrative melt into one another. Malgonkar and Nayantra Sehgal are other novelists to have set their novels in historical or political contexts. It is unfair to view *So Many Hungers!* as a piece of journalism. It is a piece of veritable literature and

not an exaggerated portrayal of hunger and famine as Paul Verghese would like to opine¹³. It vindicates the richness of the human soul.

There is a direct relationship between time and the structure of the plot. Each event and each scene contributes towards the treatment of the theme. Every development in the novel is rooted into its time. The events and scenes progress in time and their progression can be studied and looked at within the perspective of discernable time sequence. Be it the pangs of hunger, or growth of characters, or the revelation of realities, every development can be related to a particular time. The development of the structure takes place along the coordinate of time. This accounts for the compactness of the plot, a feature not so conspicuous in Bhattacharya's other novels.

The story is narrated in the omniscient, third person narrative. It moves in a linear chronological order. The flashbacks serve to give some additional facts like the one about Rahoul's first visit to his grandfather many years ago. Its plot is linear.

Both the strands of the plot deal with the education of the main characters. These strands have been very effectively integrated into the plot. The presence of the two strands in no way vitiates the smoothness of the narrative; they have been deftly handled to ensure unity of design.

The plot juxtaposes rural and urban ethos through the two strands. But, we are forced to admit that the strand involving Kajoli and her ill-fated family is far greatly charged with spiritual and emotional meanings than the one involving the Basu family. For all the metamorphosis undergone by Satayandra following the disheartening news of his younger son, Kunal, from the battle, and his disillusionment with fake titles of recognition bestowed upon him by the British government, as also for all the growth registered by Rahoul, one cannot but be moved by the story of Kajoli's family more than the Basus'. The former strand is sublimated mainly because it represents the perfect tragedy of life, of life which is shattered, uprooted and yet not directionless as is manifest through Kajoli's final resolve to live and live in a respectable way. As far as the Basus are concerned, their story is tragic but the effects of the tragedy are less intense because their loss is not of the same magnitude as the loss borne by Kajoli's family.

In this novel one does not feel any authorial intrusion. The author does not give his comments or views about its characters or situations as one finds in Thackeray. There is a complete absence of the writer's personality. Being a social realist, his presentations are free from the subtleties of D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce. His narrative technique

fits into Flaubert's view of technique, "No lyricism, comments, the author's personality absent."¹⁴

Bhattacharya's creative impulse in all its spontaneity can best be seen in the development of his plots. He is no conscious artist at least in this respect. Unlike Thomas Hardy's plots which are governed by characters and situations under the spell of some mysterious power commonly understood to mean fate, the plot of *So Many Hungers!* is the outcome of an urge to express oneself artistically. It is an expression of the writer's artistic sensibility and is not a pre-determined plot. The plot develops as naturally as characters and situations. It is through the characters, their interactions, the situations they create that the plot assumes its shape. The characters are delineated as they grow; their growth is spontaneous. They register changes and these changes condition the form of the plot. Though we may debate the question of his being an artist or propagandist, we can easily vouchsafe for his being a spontaneous writer when the structural aspect of his novels are considered.

Different characters in the novel represent different potentialities of development and kinds of freedom. The characters of Rahoul and Kajoli, the major figures in the novel, grow comprehensively. Other

secondary characters like Satyendra, Basu, Onu, etc. also grow. As stated earlier, since characters govern the plot in this novel, the plot of the novel is linear, suggestive of the human development. Kajoli's role is more conspicuous in this regard. She is essential to the artistry, thematic concerns and structural dynamics of the novel. She has been vibrantly and richly delineated. She exudes compassionate warmth, love, extraordinary capacity to suffer, self-sacrifice, courage and realizes her potentialities; she is a symbol of Indian womanhood. The structure of the novel is related to her growth as also with the growth of Rahoul.

As observed earlier, the two strands of the plot represent two different sets of values—urban and rural. The conflict between the two value-systems is represented by the Basus and Kajoli's family. Satyendra wants to make huge profit through foul means. He is a black-marketeer, making the most of the war-situation at the cost of innumerable poor lives. It is people like him who are responsible for the tragedy of countless families of Bengal during a crucial period of its history. Kajoli and her family, on the other hand, stand for patriotic zeal and self-sacrifice in the cause of country's freedom. They embody spiritual values of India. The peaceful rhythm of their lives is disturbed by the war, the devastation by nature and the evil designs of rich traders in the city. The

clash between the two sets of values does not result in the destruction of the one represented by the rural India which is time and again vindicated in the face of the onslaught of materialism. There are many instances when human spirit is seen transcending selfish considerations and rising through gestures of self-sacrifice. It is these values which are finally vindicated when Rahoul and Kajoli make their final decisions.

Thus, seen as a conflict between two value-systems as represented by the strands involving the two families, the structure of the novel may be said to be allegorical. The novel is in line with the great novels of John Bunyan, Melville, Mark Twain, Franz Kafka, Hemingway, etc. which have employed allegory to express metaphysical meanings of life.

The Structure of the novel is a product of the conflict between the two value-systems. The conflict unfolds the nobility of characters. It leads to suffering which ennobles them. It is an essential condition before one can progress spiritually. Hunger allegorizes man's inevitable suffering before he could attain a higher perception of life. As an allegorical device hunger may mean a wide range of sufferings man undergoes as a result of want of love, food, sex, security, home, cultural moorings, spiritual fulfillment, etc. The allegory raises the novel to a higher level of discourse. Human's experience of suffering is no longer

confined to his want of food alone. It encompasses man's metaphysical anguish which is intensified as the conflict between value-systems increases. The conflict between two value-systems allegorizes the age-old conflict between good and evil, between the nobility of man and depravity of Satan, and man's efforts at survival in the face of famine again allegorizes the theme of man's desire to subdue nature. This theme has been allegorically treated in *Moby Dick* by Melville through his protagonist's persistent attempts at subjugating the blue whale. Similarly, Kafka's *Castle* allegorically represents the quest for the Supreme Power by the protagonist, but the quest never succeeds. Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is also an absorbing allegory of the protagonist's attempts at realizing the "American Dream". In sum, the allegorical structures of these novels including *So Many Hungers!* symbolize the theme of quest for something. They develop as the conflict develops. It may be a conflict between the characters and the forces of nature or bureaucratic setup or age-old social institutions or imperialism itself. Conflict in any of its forms becomes a condition for the individual development of characters and the structure of these works. Their structures are based on conflict which assumes allegorical significance. Conflict being the soul of drama, *So Many Hungers!* has a plot which,

premised as it is on conflict, is dramatic in essence. Its dramatic quality accounts for it being an absorbing narrative. The reader is persistently made aware of the tension between different forces, aspirations, attitudes, etc. The tension is resolved towards the end with the determination by Kajoli to live life with dignity and respectability. But the resolution of tension is not complete. The country has still to grapple with enormous problems facing it. and the undercurrents of conflict continue.

The theme of the novel is expounded with the continuing development of the plot. In most of the modern novels the theme is not expounded in a logical continuous narrative, nor are their plots time-bound like *So Many Hungers!*. Bhattacharya has not used oblique point of view. He has well defined events. He strikes a delicate equation between time and the structure of the novel. Time is an inseparable element of his narrative technique as is the case with other novelists since the “basis of a novel is a story, and a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence.”¹⁵

The alternate shifting of the scenes from Brauni to Calcutta and vice-versa serves a purpose. It underlines the writers concern with the theme of modernity and tradition. It keeps the reader focussed on the magnitude of tragedy being enacted across the length and breath of

Bengal. This strategy also gives an additional thrust to the treatment of the theme of hunger in the novel. Hunger is presented in its different forms and thus, a wider perspective is opened up to communicate its layers of meanings.

The principle of “dynamic equilibrium” lies at the basis of the structure of the novel. This principle may be defined as the pre-determined development of the thematic concern to realize which the action progresses. The action results from the conflict between two contrary forces. In this novel the action results from the exploitative practices of the bureaucratic machinery and the rich traders on the one hand and poor innocent peasants on the other. By the same token, the action of the Basu’s family spring from the tension between Gandhian grandfather, Devata, and the money-minded father, Satyendra.

So many Hungers! is Bhattacharya’s first novel whose technical strengths, not to mention the thematic appeal, have earned him a pride of place amongst the distinguished Indian writers writing in English. It is a work of immense technical merit of which the structural aspect is indeed a great artistic achievement.

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CHAPTER III

MUSIC FOR MOHINI (1952)

Music For Mohini is the second novel by Bhattacharya which, like the preceding and the subsequent novels, is rooted into its historical context. It bears unmistakable marks of the trends in fiction writing since World War I. The writer has sought to explore and present the Indian social reality through the technique of symbolism. He emerges as a frontline practitioner of symbolism among contemporary Indian writers. The amenability of his symbolism to interpretations is his distinguishing feature as a writer and a major contributory factor to his popularity.

Music For Mohini employs symbolism at more than one level. Its characters, settings, themes, actions are impregnated with symbolic layers of meanings. Bhattacharya has a deep social purpose in writing his novels. He is the interpreter of the consciousness of Indian people. He presents their weakness and strength, their contradictions and adaptability, their traditionalism and liberalism, their ignorance and enlightenment. His militancy against the evils in Indian life is tempered by a vision of a constructive change. His progressive stance is explained by his earnest concern to regenerate Indian society.

His greatness as an artist is his uncanny faculty to present reality without sounding didactic or monotonous. His art does not degenerate into cold journalism. At his hands reality is metamorphosed into a veritable art. This he mostly accomplishes through the employment of symbolism. Wallace Stevens states, "Reality is a cliché from which we escape by metaphor."¹ The functions of symbolism have been aptly described by Harish Raizada:

It is metaphor which while working like a germ of energy among the facts adds the yeast of imagination to the material dough. Bhabani Bhattacharya does not describe events or settings because they are interesting or picturesque, but because every detail treated fits into an imaginative pattern and has a symbolic significance. This is why even when they actually appear to predominate, one cannot fail to discern the strong and basically simple outline of a symbolic configuration beneath the realistic detail. By using this symbolic mode of

perception of reality, he creates a new technique of symbolic realism.²

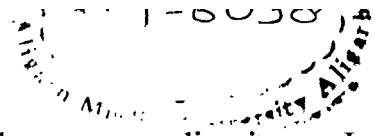
This device enables him to invest the characters, actions, settings, language, plot, etc. with deeper meanings and helps reveal the complexity which characterizes human-kind and their life.

The plot of *Music For Mohini* is built round the theme of backwardness as represented by traditionalism, and enlightenment as symbolized by the modernistic outlook of some characters. It is this conflict between obscurantism and modernism which accounts for the plot's dramatic structure. The realistic presentation of events and characters makes the social issues involved in the novel all the more pressing and convincing. The issues are invested with symbolic values. They touch upon almost every conceivable aspect of Indian life. Like *So Many Hungers!*, and *A Goddess Named Gold*, the plot of *Music For Mohini* is woven round a female character who is the protagonist. Mohini, like Kajoli and Meera, embodies an earnest desire to ameliorate the plight of the poor. She represents the vision of the writer of Indian woman, her role in free India, her sacrifices and travails she is likely to experience following the country's independence. She acts as a medium of communication between urban India and rural India. The

inevitability of interaction between the two aspects of Indian life has been comprehensively envisaged by the writer in the context of the freedom of the country.

Music For Mohini seeks to analyze Indian society at the cross-roads of old and new values. Its characters can be broadly divided into those who adhere to traditional values and those who abide by the modern values. It describes the conflict between these sets of values and their final reconciliation. This harmony between modernism and traditionalism is what can lead Indian society to progress and happiness. To bring out the theme of fusion of the modern and the conventional, the novel creates two diametrically different sets of characters.

The novel has for its settings the suburbs of Calcutta and the village of Behauli, a place many hundred kilometers away where Calcutta. The novel opens at the suburbs of Calcutta where Mohini lives at her parental home. Her father is a Professor of History in the University. Mohini is motherless. Her mother died at the time of the birth of her brother, Hiralal. She is seventeen and her brother three years her junior. Her father is an enlightened man with modern attitude towards life. He is not averse to the wind of change across urban India. He gives the best possible schooling to his daughter. He admits her to a Christian



convent school, and also permits her to become a radio-singer. In short, he is a loving, considerate father of his two motherless children. Every week he takes them to a Cinema or a park in his car to entertain them. He does not view Mohini's songs being recorded and sold in open with disfavour. Mohini's grandmother is a woman of conservative outlook. She is superstitious, orthodox and an advocate of traditional moral values in life. She does not take it kindly when Mohini's recorded songs are sold in market. She opposes such wide publicity of her grand-daughter as immoral. Whenever she feels sidelined by her son she threatens to renounce the world and go to the holy city of Banaras to spend the remainder of her life. But the ingenuity of the Professor saves the situation. A kind of temporary understanding or peace is sustained in the family. Thus the conflict between the old and the new values is sounded in the opening pages of the novel. For all his modern outlook, the father never opposes the celebrations of Hindu festivals in the family with traditional gaiety and religious spirit. He embodies the harmonious blend of modern and traditional ideas. The tension between him and the old mother escalates on the issue of Mohini's marriage. Being an enlightened man, the father wants to marry her to an educated boy. He dismisses two proposals because one of the two parties was highly materialistic and

demanded a heavy dowry, and the other proposal was rejected because the groom's people were uncouth and examined Mohini physically as if she were a commodity.

Later the third party comes with the would- be groom. They are well bred, well mannered and have grace and polish of the educated. They see Mohini and approve her. The girl's father likes the groom and comes to a decision to marry his daughter to him. The old mother voices her dissent about this match. She finds easy, frank manners of the party unpalatable. A tension develops in the family between the old grandmother and the girl's father. The altercation between them may be reproduced as follows:

His voice was joyous and proud. "Mother, we've found the right match for our girl. Look up the almanac for an auspicious day".

Old Mother was silent for a time, her face withdrawn and grave. "Why, surely, you approve-"

"... No, child," She shook her head with quite decision. "He is not the right sort for our Mohini. He and his friends have no respect for

elders. They smoked cigarettes in your presence, didn't they"?

".... No, our girl has not been trained up in their un Indian way, even if she has read at a Christian convent school. She will be a misfit in that fast circle."

"But, Mother, the groom--"

"The groom belongs to his circle. He has his roots in that soil. They are all alike. No tradition, no true culture. Apes of Westernism!"

His patience gave way. His face darkened. "Let our girl remain unwed," he cried harshly, "rather than be sacrificed to your antiquated outlook."

Old Mother's face was a picture of rage. Her eyelids flickered and her gentle mouth stiffened.

"Send me away to the Holy City. I won't have

mouthful of your food, or let water pass My
lips.”³

Due to this difference of opinions the question of marriage is left in abeyance. Their differences are resolved when a match-maker brings a proposal for Mohini. The prospective groom, Jayadev, is highly educated and currently doing research with a view to working out a synthesis between India's ancient traditional values and modern outlook so as enable Indian society stand on its own in the fast changing world. He is a person of progressive outlook and firm faith in ancient Indian lore. He is, besides, the master of Behula Village. The proposal is readily accepted by all the members of the family, including Mohini. The father happily speaks about the viability of traditional values. To quote:

“The old custom, and conventions are not too unsound,” he said. For once the son, out of his hearts fullness, graciously conceded to his mother's wisdom. “They seem to suit our mental climate.”⁴

In the same spirit the old mother also compromises on certain points with her son if she feels the conflict threatens to flare up dangerously. She softens her stand to acquiesce in any new ideas his son

wants to bring into the family. But she remains dogmatic most of the time. She derives satisfaction from charm she has tried to her son's neck chain. It becomes a symbol of the vindication of her traditionalism in the family and the Professor's attitude of compromise. To quote:

Old mother took one good look at the slim gold chain on his neck with its pendant amulet. He mocked many of the old beliefs, but the amulet was there to shield his from the Evil Eye. He had firmly refused to wear it until she had wielded that weapon of her hers, "Send me away to the Holy City." It was, indeed, one of her major triumphs.⁵

The old mother's traditionalism is not entirely inflexible. Even she shows tendency to adopt soft attitude toward modernism. Her orthodoxy is a habit of mind acquired through long association with traditional value-system. The novel describes her as:

Every Sunday evening the family went to the cinema, often an Indian film, though old mother, with all her orthodox heart, enjoyed English pictures – the shadow-shows were to

her mind a wonder of wonders, the supreme achievement of the Western people.⁶

In the light of the foregoing description we may argue that one strand of the structure of the novel allegorizes the synthesis of the old and the new values. The writer's persistent concern with the synthesis of values makes the structure of many of his novels allegorical. The professor's household represents the general ethos of urban India, which has not cut itself off altogether from traditional values nor has it allowed itself to be overwhelmed by Modernism of the west. The vision of the novelist of free India comprehends a harmonious involvement of these diverse strands. The allegorical structure is extended into the rural setting of Behula Village in Bengal.

Mohini is married to Jayadev amidst all customary celebrations concomitant to a traditional Indian marriage. She goes with her husband to Behula. In the village she assumes the role of the new mistress of the "Big-House." The "Big-House" symbolizes a citadel of thorough traditional patterns of thought and behaviour. The mother of Jayadev is a typical orthodox woman wedded to the centuries old values of her husband's house. She assiduously tries to keep alive the family traditions against all odds. The "Big-House" is a reminder of feudal set up.

Mohini's entry into the house signals the development of tension between traditional ethos and her modern liberal aspirations. She is a product of modern times. She has been groomed up in an urban atmosphere. She is an accomplished girl with a convent educational background and promising radio-singer. Besides, she has the added asset of personal beauty. Temperamentally, she shows signs of gay abandon, vitalism, and admires beautiful things. She is a person of refined aesthetic sensibility. The woman in her craves for the love of man. It finds expression in her love for her husband. She has all the qualities one expects to find in one's wife. She is keen to be loved in turn by Jayadev.

Initially the demands made by the "Big-House" on Mohini do not disturb her mental poise. She readily shoulders the responsibilities after becoming its mistress. She tries her best to make adjustments with the superstitious beliefs and highly soundless values her mother-in-law strives to perpetuate in the name of family traditions. The "Big-House" has all the symbols required to impress one with awe. It commands respect of virtually every person of the village. It has continued this image for over three centuries. The portraits of many generations of its masters and mistresses in the house evoke the memory of the past and serve to represent a chain of continuity of the family grandeur into the

present. Since her widowhood the mother has been painstakingly trying to nurture this image of the house. The “Big-House” is “much more than a residence ... a place of living, a stern discipline and iron tradition.”⁷

Mohini has been told about her new home and its demands on her by her husband:

“The “Big-House” will make heavy demands on its young mistress,” he warned her tenderly.

“Demands that you’ll find unreasonable. Some of them will have to be met with patience and a spirit of give-and-take.”⁸

She begins her new life at Behuli with assurance and composure. She is unafraid of whatever stern demands it makes on her. She is confident her husband would never be ashamed of her. She feels she “would remake her ideas and her outlook and all would be well.”⁹

With the passage of time her self-assurance gives way to a feeling of suffocation in the “Big-House”. Despite all her efforts at retouching her “mental furniture” she finds it sickeningly cold to her feelings. Time and again she encounters negative attitude of people around. Balram S. Sorot observes:

She is ridiculed by the women of Behula for her clothes. Her mother-in-law is stern and exacting and puts a number of restraints upon the young girl. Mohini's wearing of a gay coloured sari, as it becomes a new bride, irritates her. She likes to see Mohini all covered by a white cotton sheet instead of a mill made sari. The mother tells her that modern songs make no sense and that she should sing only religious songs. Again she objects to her son's bride climbing a tree-perch as it is a very unbecoming thing for the young mistress of the Big House. She does not like Mohini wearing the glass and lac bangles instead of those made of pure gold.¹⁰

Mohini faces seemingly endless restraints. Her frolicsomeness and gay abandon suppressed by these prohibitions, she tries hard to come to terms with traditional values.

The mother's unflinching conservatism hurts Mohini and she is led to form an unfavourable view of her, but as time wears on she revises her opinion about the Mother and understands her in new light. She

appreciates her kindness and spirit of sacrifice not only for her family but also for the poor people during the Bengal famine of the early forties. Her feeling of aversion changes into one of love for her. In Bhattacharya's words:

Yet, Mohini told herself, perhaps she judged the mother too harshly? Perhaps she saw the wrong side of this old tapestry of tradition and missed the design? Duty and compassion were not at odds in the mother; the key to the design was sacrifice which was a right and privilege, not a duty alone.¹¹

As the plot of the novel progresses the tension between them gets increasingly relaxed. The mother in turn realizes the importance of modern values. She begins to understand her daughter-in-law better. When she comes to know about Mohini's long awaited pregnancy, she sheds her dogmatic attitude and softens her stance. She is drawn towards her and Jayadev. The pregnancy awakens in her long suppressed motherly aspirations. The prospect of becoming a grandmother gives extra meaning to her life and symbolizes the fruit of her sacrifice. From now on a fair adjustment is reached between her and Mohini. It has been

described as:

Meantime, in the Big House, a sweet intimacy built on their common dream linked Mohini with the mother. It was as though they were two conspirators filled with one secret. Everything else, the movements and gestures of workaday life, was a covering shell.¹²

The tension between the mother and Jayadev, symbolic of the conflict between the old and the new modes of thought, is also resolved towards the end of the novel. In the novel the characters gradually learn the golden rule of making mutual adjustments through compromise since human life is all compromise. The mother feels the soundness of her son's modern beliefs and ideas. The son also makes allowance for her orthodoxy. He does not vociferously oppose her worshipping the sandals of his dead father, nor does he try to banish from his house certain socio-religious customs despite their illogicality. He sees the conflict between him and his mother as not a clash of two individuals, but of two sets of values.

The character of Mohini is at the centre of the action. Her coming to Behuli from Calcutta has a symbolic value. Her presence in the village

is like a window through which comes the wind of new ideas to the ignorant villagers. She acts as a link of communication between urban India and rural India. She does not adopt exclusivist attitude towards the womenfolk of Behuli. She teaches them rudiments of knowledge. She works in right earnest to realize a fusion of the traditional and the modern values. She identifies herself with the village women and they too feel at home in her company. She begins to conduct classes in the cool shade of a large banyan tree. A newspaper comes daily by post, and she reads out important and interesting bits from it to the assembled women. She shows them pictures. She reveals to them the richness of India. They are rapturous over her songs on the gramophone. They are filled with pride for such a mistress of the “Big-House”. The novel describes their ecstatic response in the following words:

The glory! A worthy mistress of Behuli. None like her in the hundred villages around. Their own, their joy and pride, and she was so human, without any of the plumage of the rich, whose distant look bespoke that they trod the blue pathways of the sky!¹³

Mohini brings the “Big-House” closer to the masses. She practically proves the viability of the integration of the old and the new values, an idea her husband has been so earnestly trying to establish through his scholarship. She tries to prove worthy of him and establish compatibility with him.

For all Mohini’s sincere efforts to be worthy of her husband, we notice a perceptible lack of communion between the two. The personality of Jayadev has a strong element of idealism. He expects his wife to be his intellectual companion, a source of inspiration in his scholarly endeavours. The intellectual inferiority of Mohini is disappointing to him. There is a moment when he feels himself unfit for the stupendous scholarly work he has set himself to accomplish. To his wife’s passion and warmth he remains cold. His expectation to find the image of Maitreyi in her is betrayed. The scholar in him fails to read the woman in his wife. Their married life becomes devoid of emotional intimacy. It is reduced to mechanical routine. To quote:

In all the busy hours of the day she would have

her husband’s company only for brief stretches.

He would be in the pavilion of study, reading or

writing, or working for the estate, and even if

he came in for an hour, he was an eager teacher
 not an ardent lover. He was creating his
 Maitreyi! (Futile striving, Mohini knew, as she
 strained to give herself to his will. So tiresome.
 How achieve something beyond your power?)
 And after evening worship he returned to his
 work, or received visitors.¹⁴

She finds her husband different from her expectations of him. She needs much more of him than he is able to give. On the emotional plane he remains an alien to her. The coldness in him adds to the harshness of the traditional way of life. There is an under-current of tension in their relationship. The tension in the “Big-House” operates at three levels – between the orthodoxy of the mother and liberality of Mohini; between traditionalism of the mother and modernism of her son, Jayadev; and between the emotional warmth of wife and the intellectual coldness of husband. These strands of conflict are woven into the texture of the novel and account for its tension packed structure.

The episode involving the attempted sacrifice of Mohini’s heart blood to the Virgin goddess on the mother’s bidding to bless her with a son is packed with tension. No sooner does Jayadev come to know about

it than he rushes against time to rescue his wife. He denounces the superstitious belief of his mother:

“We are not slaves of the stars,” Jayadev answered. “there is no room in the Big House for crazy beliefs. The village looks to us for ideals and way of living. The pattern we set is not our private affair; it carries the strongest social sanction.”¹⁵

The mother gets angry and says she is ashamed to have him as her son. This episode in the novel describes their ideological conflict at the highest pitch. Finally the mother understands her son’s stand and the distance between them narrows down and they reconcile. The change in her attitude has been described as:

For the first time, she could see her son clearly. His ideas, his point of view, moulded by the new spirit in the land, were different from hers and opposed to them, but they were nonetheless, true ideals.¹⁶

When the mother is told about Mohini’s pregnancy by Dr. Hirendra, she is over-joyed and rues her decision to have tried to sacrifice

her heart-blood. She is immediately brought closer to her and the tension eases off. The use of irony has been sensitively manipulated in this episode. The reader shares the Mother's unease at the thought of what tragedy would have befallen Mohini and the "Big-House" had she been sacrificed for a child which she has been crying in her womb all the while. The mother and Sudha's involvement in a conspiracy to oust Mohini from the "Big-House" lends further sharpness to the irony. The mother undergoes acute spiritual crisis, a sort of self-reproach as is evident in the following lines:

What madness had grown out of her anguish,
and how she had tortured both Mohini and
herself. The mother of the Big House had
transgressed the basic moral laws as though
they were meaningless.¹⁷

The deft handling of irony has been characteristic of Bhattacharya.

Towards the end the conflict between the mother, Jayadev and Mohini ends. Jayadev responds to the physical needs of his wife and peace returns to the house. Mohini is fulfilled as is evident in the following passage:

At last, there was no discord. Life was music –
 note of song for the old mother was in her, a
 note for Jayadev and his rebel gods, a note for
 the Big House and Behuli village torn and at
 cross purpose for a while. Her life was music –
 the quest for every woman, her deepest need.¹⁸

The meaning of the title is derived from the final resolution of discord in the family and happiness Mohini achieves as a result. The symbolic value of the title of the novel derives from the happiness Mohini achieves after so many hardships. Music suggests happiness which comes with the resolution of tension operating at many levels. The title subtly hints at the structure of conflict and resolution of the novel. This pattern is common to the writer's all novels. Mohini symbolizes modern values. She is pitted against the age-old traditions as epitomized by the "Big-House". Like the *Howards End* in E. M. Forster's novel by the same name, the "Big-House" of the village of Behuli becomes a battle ground between two conflicting value-systems. It occupies a structurally significant position in the novel. The novel's principal theme of conflict between modernism and traditionalism is mainly explored through the symbolism of the "Big-House". In working out the resolution

of the conflict towards the end, the author seems to have contrived it rather than arrived at it in a convincing and spontaneous manner. This is one aspect of his writing where Bhattacharya confirms the impression of his being a propagandist and not an instinctive artist. The plot of the novel develops as the tension develops. The conflict can be seen at multiple levels involving virtually all the major and minor characters. The conflict informs the structure of the plot. As a result, the structure of the novel becomes symbolic of conflict and hence highly dramatic. The novel dramatically portrays Indian society at a time when it was passing through the throes of transition.

Central to the symbolism in the novel is the character of Mohini. She is symbolic of the Feminine Principle as enshrined in the mythology of not only the eastern culture but western as well. The Feminine Principle consists of four qualities a woman is capable of realizing in her life, namely, Mother, Companion, Amazon (autonomous) and Prophetess. Mohini exemplifies these qualities in varying degrees, but the companion quality is the most pronounced in her character. Be it her relationship with her own brother, Hiralal, or her father or Ranjan or the little boys of the village of Behuli, or her husband, Mohini comes through as an indispensable companion who has the formative influence on them.

In presenting Mohini as a wife seeking to derive emotional and physical satisfaction from her husband, the novelist has perhaps tried to shift the focus from the traditional image of woman as a second-fiddle to man, a passive member of the house-hold to the new role of a modern woman who demands fulfillment emotionally and sexually as well. Mohini's mother quality is displayed through her acts of educating women and children of the village. Her defiance of her mother-in-law's injunctions by climbing the branch of a tree in the garden of the "Big-House" is symbolic of her amazonian role. Her role of a "prophetess" is illustrated by her constructive acts aimed at bridging the gap between the rural and the urban India.

The theme of conflict between old and new values and their fusion has been treated in other episodes of the plot. Dr. Hirendra and Jayadev represent progressive forces in the village. They work in right earnest to bring about a revolution in Behuli by changing the traditional grooves of thought and conservative approach to life of the villagers. These enlightened young men are not averse to tradition in its positive aspect. They only want to effect synthesis of ancient Indian wisdom and modern progressive values. Hirendra's father is an old man who practices old Ayurvedic system of medicine to treat his patients. He is ignorant of its in

efficacy in treating many of the ailments which can only be cured by modern medicines. Hirendra does not tolerate such ignorance. He is a surgeon, trained in a modern medical college. He tries to argue with his father about the irrelevance of ancient system of medicine in modern context. The father, entrenched in orthodox modes of thought, is angry with his son. To quote:

Here was challenge to the indigenous system of Ayurveda, the system that had prevailed for a millennium. To think that his son should be a carrier of alien contamination... what madness had come upon him that he had sent his son to town and let him study at a medical school where they cut up live rats and dissect corpses.¹⁹

But later, when his father fails to cure his wife and further endangers her life by keeping her on Ayurvedic medicines for long, he realizes his folly. He recognizes the efficiency of the modern Allopathic system which cures his dying wife. At last he is reconciled to the views of his son. It illustrates the idea of synthesis of the old and the new values.

The conflict between the conservative and modern outlook is again manifest in the village-pond episode. There is a pond near Shiva's temple in the village. The pond is covered with dirt and green hyacinth and functions as a breeding place for mosquitoes spreading diseases. Jayadev, Hirendra and the like minded people want to start their work to ensure hygienic conditions for the villagers. They decide to clear the pond of its dirt, but the priest of the temple strongly opposes any such move. The priest is a thoroughly conservative man and is not prepared to tolerate any change in the surroundings of the temple. He has fabricated a story that a repentant devotee of Shiva lives in the pond in the form of a crocodile, and any attempt at disturbing him by removing the dirt from the pond would tantamount to a grievous sin. The priest enjoys the support of a vast majority of villagers and the task of cleaning the pond is not easy for Hirendra and his friends. Their problems is solved by an ironic twist in the plot. It so happens that the little son of the priest's daughter is found missing one day. The priest is greatly concerned about the safety of the boy. It is generally feared that the crocodile of the pond has swallowed him. The opportunity presents itself to Hirendra and his men to remove its weedy growth and dirt over-night. The priest does not object to the cleaning of the pond. But neither the boy nor the crocodile is

found. Amidst prevailing apprehension the boy comes on a donkey escorted by a farmer of a neighbouring village. The priest and his daughter are filled with joy and she does not mind when her boy tells her that he has eaten fish, a thing forbidden for Brahmins. The scene has been dramatically described in the writer's inimitable style:

“I ate fish,” the boy cried in a sort of triumph to his mother as she held him clasped in her arms. She gazed misty-eyed at him and the tears of joy ran down her cheeks. Fish was forbidden food.²⁰

This episode is another instance of the smoothing over of hurt feelings and conflicting view-points. It reinforces the structure of tension and resolution of the novel. Directly related to the synthesis of the two diverse systems of values is the theme of social rejuvenation of India which is not possible without reconciling the two modes of thought. The structure of the novel corresponds to the structure of Indian society exhibiting an on-going sequence of tension and resolution in the wake of independence. The country is still learning to come to terms with the realities in the changing world. This streak of realism is unmistakably present in the novel.

The character of Jayadev has been sketched in a manner so as to have a direct bearing on the novels' thematic concern. He is a major character with a vision of future India. His plan about social uplift is calculated to have wide repercussions across the country. He starts his work from his native village. He says to his wife:

“I want to make Behuli a model village – socially. Our political freedom is worth little without social uplift. (I hate the world!) That means struggle. If we win, as we must, Behuli will be an example for all Bengal.”²¹

In the novel the characters representing traditionalism are symbols of obstacles on the country's path of development. The novel contains twenty chapters. Its plot spans two geographical places – Calcutta and Behuli village. The first nine chapters are set in Calcutta more or less, and the remaining twelve chapters in Behuli. Technically speaking, the plot of the novel is far from compact. Even a cursory reading of the book gives the impression about the writer's casual approach to its technical aspects. There are many incidents in the novel which loosen the compactness of its plot. Incidents like childish playfulness between Mohini and Hiralal, their antics, the journey of the newly wed couple to

Behuli, etc. will hardly stand a close technical scrutiny. Unlike other novels by Bhattacharya this one fails to realize unity of effect. The esthetics involved in the treatment of the theme of social uplift lacks enduring appeal. The novelist seems to be rushing through the plot to produce climactic effect but in vain. Though the novel seeks to treat the theme of fusion of the Eastern and Western values, we are left unconvinced about its actual materialization in the story.

It would not be far-fetched to say that *Music For Mohini* is a novel of plot more than of character. The characterization is made subservient to the situations. The characters have been sketched in accordance with the situation. It is the situation which conditions the behaviour of the character and not the vice-versa. For all the positive traits the characters possess, the fact remains that they do not inspire the reader with the greatness of spirit. They remain shadows in the background. Apart from Jayadev, the characters of Mohini; Roopa, Mother; Heerala; Sudha; and Narendra are important in the novel. But those of Bindu; the cook-woman; Ranjan, the snake-charmer; and some womenfolk of the village are insignificant and do not contribute to the development of the plot. Mohini's character acts as a conjunctive link between Calcutta and Behuli village. She is a medium of interaction

between the urban and the rural values. She has a functional relevance as different events in the novel are inter-related through her character. She lends a measure of unity of design to the story. She lacks Meera's exuberance and Kajoli's pragmatism. She resigns herself to fate and circumstances. The music for her becomes a reality because her destiny comes to save her in the eleventh hour. She does not achieve happiness on account of strength of character and mental toughness. These qualities are foreign to her. She does not live up to our expectations of a heroine though her presence is seen in most of the pages of the novel.

The character of Mohini's father stands on the border-line between the important and unimportant characters. He figures only in the early chapters. He is drawn as a considerate father, kind teacher to students and humane towards others. He gets his daughter married to an educated man and is understandably anxious about her adjustment in a village. He does not figure in the later chapters. Technically, he is a stunted character who has not been given larger presence on the canvas of the novel.

Jayadev's character lacks vitality. Neither his role as a lover nor his image of an intellectual has been developed sufficiently. His marital life is marked by emotional coldness on his part and his intellectual

pursuit threatens to go awry. His character leaves much to be desired. He lacks heroic individuality.

Rooplekha is Jayadev's elder sister married in Calcutta. She is greatly different from her mother. She is considerate, loving and undogmatic. Her pragmatic approach to life is evident in her ability to change her habits for the sake of her husband. Her role in the novel is that of a supporting character in the "Big-House". She mentally prepares Mohini for the hard task of adjustment with her mother-in-law and thus facilitates her absorption in the "Big-House". She exemplifies a blend of the old and the new values. Though she does not contribute to the development of the plot, but her character serves to emphasize the theme of assimilation of diverse values. In terms of the structure of the novel she represents a force resolving tension, whereas her mother appears as an originator of tension.

The character of Sudha is again not fully drawn. She promises more than being a passive participant in the action of the novel. She is a girl of feelings and sensitivity. Her beauty and grace do not save her from heartbreak for no fault of her own. Circumstances seem to have conspired against her to make her jealous of Mohini. She wants to be the mistress of the "Big-House" even at the cost of Mohini's life. Even the possibility

of her union with Narendra has not been properly explored. She leaves us thinking about the dimensions her character could have reached if only the novelist had taken pains to elaborate her role. The character of Narendra too has a little part to play. He appears in the later part of the novel. Technically, he contributes to further the theme of social uplift.

The minor characters like Bindu; Ganesh; Ranjan; Meera; the barber woman, etc. are not significant for the development of the plot, but they have a place in little events which constitute diversions from the main action.

The novel does not have much physical action and mobility which could elaborate the significance of the title. We may cite Dr. Chandrasekhran in this regard:

There is much in the novel to entertain, to delight and even to provoke. But the music we hear is only the soft and subdued melody of the flute and not the varied harmony of a rich orchestra.²²

Though the plot has all the ingredients of an absorbing family drama – marital love, parental love, filial love, differences, tensions,

sympathetic resonances, elemental facts of life, mutual adjustments, etc, but as an artistic construction, it is far from perfect.

The plot is devoid of intricacy of architectonics and the design is unusually casual. The progress of the plot does not evoke curiosity. Events, incidents, let alone characters, have not been artistically organized to create an aesthetically satisfying novel. It is decidedly a weak plot. The writer has not sufficiently presented the relationships between different characters. They need to be further explored. He has given unnecessarily more space to unimportant incidents and characters. It impedes the development of characters and the proper shaping of the plot.

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CHAPTER IV

***HE WHO RIDES A TIGER* (1955)**

This is yet another novel of man's epic struggle against the unjust social equations which are as old as the ancient vedic civilization. It is the story of a blacksmith, Kalo, living in a small town, Jharana, in Bengal, and his daughter, Chandra Lekha. It is set against the backdrop of a widespread famine of Bengal of 1943. It would do well for a discerning student of Indian history to read this novel along with *So Many Hungers!* to vividly catch for himself the darkest chapter in the history of that fair province.

Though *He Who Rides a Tiger* and *So Many Hungers!* treat the theme of hunger, exploitation and debasement of man, *He Who Rides a Tiger* is no rehash of the latter novel. It launches a scathing criticism on the evil of caste system which has been the bane of Indian society. Arguably the writer's best novel, it touches the pulse of the irony of Indian social life. The Indian social realities are presented with increasing bitterness within the perspective of the freedom movement. Its greatness as a piece of literature lies in its assertion of tremendous potentialities of the spiritual growth of man, and a thorough exposure of

an imperfect social system. The theme of the novel is hinted at in the opening paragraph:

Fond parents often name their timid shrimp of a boy warrior king or Brave in Battle. Hefty, pitch-dark girls go through life with the label lightning streak or Lotus wreath. But Kalo, black, was true to his complexion, which had the colour quality of ink, and people said that when he sweated, you could collect the oozing fluid for your inkwell. Kalo parried this friendly jibe with his usual good humour.¹

It is the search for identity by Kalo, the protagonist, that constitutes the action and its major thematic concern. The search involves his assuming the role of a Brahmin priest by hiding his real identity of being a low-born to take revenge on a society that has perpetuated a grossly inhuman attitude of one section towards another for centuries. Kalo's assumption of the brahmanical façade dominates the action, thus accounting for its ironic structure. The irony sustains the structure of the plot. The irony is further reinforced by the social gestures of other

characters like the rich traders of Calcutta and priests. These gestures are readily approved of by people as acts of charity and religiosity.

Kalo is a simple, hardworking man, skilled in his profession. He has deep faith in the social conventions. He subscribes to the caste hierarchy and his “Roots were deep in the age-richened soil of his own caste.”² But certain unhappy developments make him revolt against the existing social system. He questions the inherent social inequalities and injustice, but he receives no answer. His consciousness of his low caste, his poverty and starvation, his imprisonment for an insignificant offence, his stint in a brothel as a pimp, and his daughter’s sufferings and humiliation in the brothel turn him into a staunch rebel against society.

To quote:

His battle was with the accuser, the centuries-old tradition, from which had come the inner climate of his being... Kalo had not only to deny but to eradicate the values by which he had been bred. He had to cut his social taproot and give up his inheritance.³

His first step in this direction is the renunciation of the caste and his becoming a Brahmin. It is indeed a courageous act without a

precedence in Indo-Anglian fiction. He makes a valiant effort at cutting himself free from his age-old habits of thought and practice. But he is not able to keep the façade for long for the black-smith in him writhes under the imposition of the new role. A conflict ensues between Kalo, the black-smith, and Mangal Adhikari, the self-style Brahmin priest. He goes through life as a chosen one by God, but at times he identifies himself with the lot of the down-trodden like Vishwanath, the gardener in the temple.

When the mental conflict becomes unbearable he decides “to kill the tiger” and go back to his forsaken roots. The tiger is symbolic of Kalo’s assumed role of a Brahmin priest, a task requiring super-human courage and boldness. Chandra Lekha, his daughter, acts as a catalyst to expedite his momentous decision to reveal the truth to the people, “I who made this temple was not born a Brahmin”⁴

This public declaration restores him to his former self and also to his peace of mind.

The restoration is not without changes in the personality of Kalo. He is no longer the same caste-bound man. Since he has taken revenge on the unjust society which was responsible for his miseries and has befooled the very caste (Brahmin caste) which has been dictating social

equations down the ages, he is decidedly a winner. Now he can look at a 'twice-born' in his eyes without the nagging feeling of inferiority. During his assumed role he has had ample opportunities to see the high caste people shorn of their artificial social trappings. He has perceived the reality of caste hierarchy. This public confession whereby he kills the tiger is no simple feat of courage and honesty. It elevates his character and firmly establishes his heroic stature. To quote Ihab Hassan who has observed in different context, but can be applied to our hero:

The disparity between the innocence of the hero
and the destructive character of his experiences
defines his concrete, existential, situations.⁵

We can divide the novel into two parts for analytical purposes. The first part, consisting of the first seven chapters, deals with Kalo's life of peaceful innocence in his native town of Jharna and also his undergoing some bitter experiences; the second part, spanning the remaining twenty chapters, describes his growth in the school of adversities and culminates in his mental release from the age-old slavish habits of mind which his low-birth has taught him. This pattern of the narrative helps us easily comprehend its thematic meanings. It symbolizes the development of the protagonist through the rough and tumble of life. In the process of the

narrative the writer exposes certain contradictions in Indian society. The period of Bengal famine of 1943 is selected for its artistic value. It helps the author to richly portray a character. The context provides the writer with many opportunities to describe the heroism of his character in various moments of acute spiritual torment. The famine is at the back of Kalo's decision to leave Jharna and go to Calcutta in search of a work to feed his family, and his harsh experiences in Calcutta and his final self-realization.

Through bitter experiences Kalo learns that the mask he wears is not going to bring him inner peace. His success behind the mask becomes meaningless. He realizes that the dichotomy between his appearance and his reality will destroy him. These reflections together with his innate sense of integrity impel him towards confession of his reality to the assembled crowd. The theme of the novel-development of the consciousness of the protagonist – is sustained artistically throughout the book which is fundamentally concerned with his character. The plot is woven round him; that explains its linear structure. The novel can be compared to Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar In a Sieve* in its dealing with such issues as hunger, juxtaposing of city and village values, and the state of "innocence" and the state of "evil experiences" of a character. It also

echoes R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* in the portrayal of its central character and the priestly fraud.

The central concern in this novel is character-delineation, and it has been done to perfection with regard to Kalo's character. The two aspects, viz., the moral aspect, which governs a person's behaviour, responses in a situation; and the psychological aspect which reveals a person's thinking about himself in a situation he is in, have been deftly handled by Bhattacharya through the agencies of other characters like Chandra Lekha and Biten. When Kalo wants to marry his daughter, Chandra Lekha, to a Brahmin, he is reminded of the old times by her when they used to live a happy, peaceful life. He is not able to forget his past. Biten (B-10 or Bikash Mukherji) is also not able to shake off his roots. The conclusion of the novel fits into its artistic conception. When Kalo makes a bold confession in the end it leaves the crowd spell-bound for a time before the import of his declaration sinks in their minds. The dramatic and cathartic effects of his speech have been effectively brought out by Biten's response to his confession. He says:

You have triumphed over those others-and over
yourself. What you have done just now will
steel the spirit of hundreds and thousands of us:

your story will be a legend to inspire and awaken.⁶

The growth of Kalo's consciousness becomes symbolic of the growth of national consciousness. His consciousness reflects relationships which indicate the novel's cultural value and the novelist's moral vision. Bhattacharya explores in his art what D. H. Lawrence would call "the relation between man and his circumambient universe at the living moment."⁷

The novel is the author's *tour de force* for its ironic revelation of the relation between the façade and the reality in a tradition-bound society.

Through the public confession of his birth he finds freedom for himself and his daughter. Through this confession he destroys both the 'tiger' he has been riding and unable to dismount and which is the cause of his spiritual anguish. In the novel he has been shown in different roles – as a thief, as a pimp, as a religious devotee; but these roles do not lead to his fulfilment. His fulfilment corresponds to confession. The structure of his journey to self fulfilment relates to his adopting an unusual name for his daughter, a name suggested by a Brahmin priest; his educating her; his dreaming for a better future for her; his migration to Calcutta; his

moral discomfiture in the brothel house when he finds his daughter; and then his assumption of the role of a Brahmin. It becomes complete with his adoption of an orphan boy whom he gives the name of his unborn son, Obhijit.

He Who Rides a Tiger combines many social and artistic issues of abiding value. Different situations in the novel involve different moral questions faced by our society. The mental conflicts suffered by the central character artistically represent attempts at resolving certain contradictions in Indian society. The novel gains in importance because it presents a vision essentially moral. Its beauty is derived from the irony, that a lie, a façade, “an antic disposition” is used to expose the greatest tragedy of Indian civilization – the caste system. It is a civilization which takes pride in being the nursery of a few religious systems of the world and a rich intellectual heritage. The structure of the plot is built on the irony of Kalo passing for a high-caste Brahmin priest who removes the social veneer and exposes the hypocrisies of high caste people. To quote S. C. Harrex:

Bhattacharya's fictional ironies and satirical observations undermine the hypocrisy of the rich (who spend vast sums enhancing their

status and buying spiritual insurance while they ignore, but, contribute to the suffering of the starving multitudes) and expose the hypocrisy of those who mask their corrupt and immortal natures beneath a great religious affectation of humility.⁸

Kalo takes pleasure in befooling the high caste devotees, in making them ‘polluted and fallen.’ He assumes the new role of a priest and rides this lie precariously as if it were a tiger which he could not dismount lest the tiger should pounce upon him and eat him up. He feels suffocated under this role. He suffers from a lie which he has intended to employ against the society which has wronged him and countless others. He finds his own daughter, Chandra Lekha, threatened to be metamorphosed into the temple deity, “The mother of seven-fold bliss”, a kind of death-in-life situation. The only way for her to escape from this unnatural situation is her marriage with old Motichand who had already cast off three wives. Kalo resolves to kill the ‘tiger’ he has been unable to dismount. He exhibits boundless courage when he addresses the big crowd in the precincts of the temple as can be discerned in the following passage:

... now listen well, priests and pundits listen to the truth... I have installed a false God, for there was no dream at all. I have made you commit sacrilege and blackened your faces. There lies no expiation for you- may be the writers of the holy books have not dreamed that such a thing could happen! A downtrodden “kamar” has been in charge of your inmost souls, souls corrupt with caste and cash.⁹

The scenes in the novel are described with such vibrancy that the reader feels the actual enactment of human drama before his eyes. Scenes of stark poverty, sub-human existence of slum-dwellers, flesh trading by women when pangs of hunger reach extreme point, etc. suggest the writer’s keen observation of the core of Indian reality. The pathos of the scene is realized by his artistry. The novel champions the cause of the exploited masses. It portrays them rising against the evils of caste-system. Biten is arrested and put behind the bars for his protest against the criminal attitude of the police towards a simple man simply because he was starving. The development of Kalo from a caste-bound “kamar” into a social rebel has been epitomized as:

A small rebel was born when he sold his tools
and set off for the big city. The rebel grew eyes
and ears in court and prison, with the help of B-
10, gave it a mouth and a protest. Out of that
protest he has acted mutinously, challenging
man and God.¹⁰

S. Memon Marath's *The Wound of Spring* (1960) can be compared to *He Who Rides a Tiger* in its criticism of casteism and its debilitating effects on the innocence of its victim.

What makes Bhattacharya's novel such a favorite with critics and readers alike is its aesthetic appeal. But its aesthetics have been so manipulated as to appear secondary to its thematic concerns. It combines warmth of human understanding, concern for the evils of caste system, and sympathetic portrayal of the life of the common man. Bhattacharya is a socially committed artist. He depicts the eternal conflict between good and evil. He champions the cause of the poor and the exploited like Mulk Raj Anand but with a difference. He champions their cause as part of a larger battle against the evil which is seen in different forms. Kalo rises in revolt against the evil of casteism. He struggles against the so called

pillars of society who perpetuate this evil. He launches an offensive against them by devising the strategy of setting up a false god.

The novelist brings into focus many other social evils. He exposes the institution of prostitution in Indian society. He depicts men disguised as Brahmins, cheating the high caste people and hailed by them as gifted with great spiritual power. He also lays bare the gullibility and superstitious nature of Indian people and the mechanicality of religious customs and rites. He ridicules the self-claimed superiority of the Brahmins and the Hindu law which forbids divorce.

The protagonist's journey through different experiences of life has allegorical significance. His experiences and changes at the physical level correspond with his experiences at the spiritual level. His physical journey through life represents his spiritual journey. The novel allegorizes the triumph of human soul over corrupting influence of crass materialism.

It is fundamentally the story of a fight against the social organization. It describes the inter-class struggle within the Hindu community and its inherent contradictions. Set in the early forties, it reveals the growing awareness among the poor and the down trodden following a series of political developments in India like the Communal

Award (1932) of Macdonald; the establishment of anti-untouchability league; Gandhiji's vociferous protests against the practice of untouchability, etc. Kalo's fight against the exploitative and unjust social conventions is indicative of the growing consciousness of the poor classes. He exposes the baselessness and absurdity of the social hierarchy as seen in the caste system. He finally succeeds in imparting a class consciousness to the exploited class. It prepares them for the fight to get their long denied rights.

In delineating Kalo's character the novelist shows high level of artistic skill. He is so thoroughly portrayed that by the time we end the novel his personality stands out before us in all its aspects. He is an individual but at the same time he can be seen as a type. As an individual his character becomes timeless, and as a type he becomes a representative of his age.

The novelist thinks that if a society is fortunate enough to have a few sensitive and selfless people who can champion the cause of the poor and direct their efforts in the right direction, it can hope for a change for the better. This explains the rationale for creating the character of Biten (B-12) in the novel. He is a monor chracter. It is he who imparts the device of raising a false God to deceive the people to Kalo. It sets him

out on the path of revenge on the upper castes. Biten's personal experiences of his family, of his sister's suicide, when she is prevented to marry her lover from lower caste etc. make him a social rebel. The very idea of casteism is obnoxious to him. He renounces his Brahminism, his family, his roots, and goes through many difficulties with courage. He works like a common man without any Brahminical pretensions. He also decides to marry a girl from a lower caste. He is a powerful character who proves that it is possible to lead a meaningful life without the trappings of a high caste. Notwithstanding Kalo's overwhelming presence in the novel, Biten lingers in our memory for the sheer force of his character.

Bhattacharya reflects different tendencies of the period through his characters. He shows how different factors -- national, foreign, domestic, social -- act and react with each other and govern the lives of the people. The main characters are portrayed in the context of their age. They are portrayed as becoming aware of their rights under the influence of western ideas. He has graphically described changes consequent upon India's contact with the western world. The changes are experienced by every section of Indian society. The down-trodden becomes assertive for his rights and the exploitative class feels the punch of this assertion.

Through his literary output Bhattacharya emerges as an architect with a keen desire to correct history by shaping public opinion, by removing certain social, historical anomalies and protecting India's rich ethical and moral values. He echoes the commitment of Mulk Raj Anand as expressed in his celebrated essay 'Apology for Heroism':

In so far then as an art work results from the reflection in the mind of the artist of all aspects of his experience, it is fundamentally related to life, only improving on it or rather intensifying it through the 'creative myth', so as to change life in the deeper centers of other peoples experience and thus present an integral vision of what people could be like. And as he can perceive reality at its highest and disclose a way to a new life, the artist stands as an inspiring force behind all those men and women who face the tasks of reconstructing the future society out of the shambles of a near prehistoric present.¹¹

Bhattacharya derives inspiration from contemporary period. The world that surrounds him is his main motivational force for writing. The novel is a genuine piece of realistic literature. Its depiction of the social, economic, cultural and political conditions of the contemporary period is executed in a realistic mode. The novel does not simply provide us aesthetic pleasure, it also presents before us a vision of a glorious future. It makes the reader understand himself, his responsibilities, his role in shaping the course of history.

The narrative style of the novel is absorbing. The reader feels himself participating in the action itself. The novelist at times evokes the inquisitiveness of the reader, and sometimes he satisfies the curiosity through the technique of flashback. Sometimes he moves alternately back to the past and then to the present. This skipping between the past and the present does not vitiate the smoothness of the narrative, nor does it damage the linear structure of the novel. The description of the past events is invariably related to the present and helps give a clearer view of the action. This flashback technique lends dramatic quality to the novel. The chronological order is interfered with only on rare occasions like when the author needs to convey extra information about a character. In the novel he holds back the narrative to give additional idea about

Motichand's polygamous nature. Similarly, Bhattacharya holds up some facts for a while to evoke suspense like Chandra Lekha not telling her father about her harrowing experiences in the brothel-house till much later in the novel. This technique helps in sustaining the interest of the reader.

The artistic and technical merits of the opening scene deserve special attention. This scene sets the tone of the story. It tells us about Kalo's antecedents, his present, the ethos of a typical Indian town, the inherent tensions in the social fabric, the energetic nature of the protagonist, etc. Indeed we find every ingredient of a great drama in the opening scene. One cannot wish for a better opening. In truth, it is the very foundation of the structure of the novel.

Through the development of Kalo's character, the writer reveals his faith in the essential goodness of man, in his tremendous potentialities, and the possibility of a bright future. This low-born character challenges the centuries old social set up by becoming a high priest, providing for its spiritual needs. He restores natural rhythm in his and his daughter's life by proclaiming to the world his reality. The novel describes his victory over society. To quote:

They had come back in time to bear him, to see him drive his deep steel into the tiger. The scum of the earth had hit back, hit back where it hurt.¹²

The novel, thematically speaking, can also be interpreted as an attempt at dismantling caste-ridden social structure in order to harmonize different strata of society. Kalo is pained by his daughter's medal going unrecognized because she belongs to a low caste. This is the beginning of his antagonistic attitude towards the high caste people which is further abetted by his subsequent sufferings. He cunningly deceives those people who are puffed up with a sense of pride on account of being high born. In Bhattacharya's words his success has been described as:

He had upset the old social order by investing himself with Brahminhood and rising to the top, he still seemed to believe. Instead of undermining society, he had become part of it, used its strength for he had tacitly accepted its rulers and served its purpose well. What real difference did it make either to the order to

which he truly belonged or to the one to which
he had attached himself?¹³

He exposes the baselessness of caste distinctions and tries to work out a harmonious synthesis of different castes. He asserts before the assembled crowd, "Do not dare judge me or call me a swindler. I have been as Brahminic as any of you."¹⁴

Similarly Biten renounces his Brahminhood and falls in love with Chandra Lekha and wants to marry her. When giving her consent to his marriage, Kalo observes that sometimes in life a big compromise has to be made. This brings out the theme of synthesis in the novel.

The imagery of the tiger is suggestive of its basic theme. Its direct significance in terms of its theme has been stated by Dr. Meenakshi Mukherjee:

The metaphor of the tigers becomes relevant
because neither Kalo nor his daughter has the
courage to go back. Their deception is the tiger
they are riding---and to dismount would be to
court death.¹⁵

But Kalo is not able to sustain the deception for long. He is determined to

come back to his old true self. He and his daughter, to quote Shanta Krishna Swamy:

dethrone themselves voluntarily the tiger of
 fraudulence that they had been riding. Feet firm
 on earth, they confront harsh reality with
 dignity, they do not despair of the uncertain
 future that awaits them.¹⁶

Kalo's assumption of the role of a Brahmin priest is also symbolic. It enables the writer lend sharpness to his satire on people taking pride in being 'high born'. He explodes the myth of caste related privileges. He drives home the point that even a low-born can enjoy the grace of heaven. Despite being ridiculed by the high caste people who are assembled to hear his last speech, Kalo emerges as the Messiah of the down-trodden.

The act of killing the tiger bespeaks Kalo's unusual courage more than his act of mounting it. His heroism is doubly confirmed by it. He proves that even a low-born can rise in the social scale and pay the high-born in the same coin in which he has been paid down the ages.

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CHAPTER V

A GODDESS NAMED GOLD (1960)

A Goddess Named Gold is considered to be one of the best novels on Indian village life. Like the preceding novels it too has substantially drawn female characters. But in this novel female characters occupy much larger canvas than in the previous works. It is about the courageous efforts of the women of a village, Sonamatti, to free themselves from the iron-clutches of the money-lender of their village. This struggle is led by a young girl of seventeen, Meera. Meera is the central character and is equally involved in the main and the secondary plots of the novel. The sub plot is related to the 'taveez' episode and the expectation of the villagers to see it work a miracle.

Both the plots are complementary to each other. They have been artistically integrated so as to convey the impression of a single narrative. The second plot has been very deftly handled to serve the purpose of the novelist, viz., the employment of Gandhian philosophy of Satyagraha and non-violence to achieve freedom of the poor villagers from the encroaching and exploitative designs of the money-lender.

It deals with the theme of economic liberation of the poor and the evil fall-outs of economic exploitation. It views profiteering and black-marketing as anathema to the country's hard earned political freedom. Such acts are responsible for further complications of our problems. The action of the novel is set around India's independence. It conveys a note of warning that unless the masses make collective efforts to improve their lot, *they will not be able to enjoy rich dividends concomitant to freedom.* To cite Atmaram, the wandering minstrel, "Freedom is the beginning of the road where there was no road. But the new road swarms with robbers."¹

Bhattacharya's persistent concern with the idea of the confrontation of the modern and the traditional values assumes a new aspect by depicting the growth in the consciousness of Indian women and the assertion of their rights. The opening pages of the novel present in retrospect the participation in Quite India Movement of the women of Sonamatti. Women representing virtually every age group were part of the giant upsurge against the alien rulers. Lakhshami, the wife of the notorious Seth, whose devotion towards her husband notwithstanding, is a champion of the cause of poor women of the village. She is shown to have gone to jail with them during country's freedom struggle. Sohagi,

her friend and poor village woman, says, “You are the Seth’s wife Lakshami, but you are also our sister.”² She threatens to bare herself in public before her husband if he refuses to sell cloth at fair price to village women. She succeeds in making her husband accept the just demand of the women folk. She is against his evil practices and not against him as a person.

In “Cow-house five” the novelist gives us a glimpse of resurgent women of modern times. Munni, Meera, Suhagi, Bimla and Champa are in the thick of every action against the Seth and are conscious of their rights and can act whenever situation demands. It is they who organize a march to the Seth’s shop to press their demands.

Atmaram, an old man and minstrel, is another significant character. He embodies traditional spiritual values and modern approach to the fast changing conditions in free India. Though he spends much of his time away from his village, he is never able to forget his roots in his native place. He has seen enough of the city people and the world at large. He has an aura of mystic splendour about him. He regales the people with his devotional songs conveying scriptural themes and he “owns nothing, yet has the dignity of a king.”³

He represents the link between the past and the present. He is a man of broadened consciousness and comprehends the dangerous effects of exploitative attitude of the moneyed class. He is piqued by the unequal distribution of land in the country. He describes his views on things:

“The fruit giving earth is enough for all if shared fairly. So much belongs to so few. The same tale everywhere. One man owns half a village; the tillers have the rest in five hundred morsels.

He fully appreciates the value of “vote” and the dynamics of democracy are not beyond his understanding. He warns the people against the likes of the Seth who are contesting elections to the District Board lest the fruits of freedom be lost. He is greatly respected in his village. His advice is sought by the villagers in daily affairs of life.

Atmaram is a votary of Gandhian philosophy. His vision of a free India is one where the masses will be cared for, where they will enjoy better life, free from the age-old exploitation by the rich. He exhorts his grand-daughter, Meera “to wipe every tear from every eye.”⁵

His idealism is firmly grounded on his realistic perspective on things and his practical wisdom. The touchstone fable is his brain-child

through which he wants to deceive the gullible Seth so that the village be saved from his ever increasing greed. Though Atmaram has a peripheral presence in the novel, technically, he is indispensable to the development of the plot. He also acts as a link between the two plots. Unlike other secondary characters in Bhattacharya's other novels like B2 in *He Who Rides a Tiger*, Bireswar in *A Shadow From Ladakh*, etc., Atmaram's role is more substantial, and technically more viable. The story will lose much of its charm and its folk over-tones if his character were removed. In fact his character is a greater artistic triumph of the writer than the character of Devata in *So many Hungers!* His character, though figuring in absentia for most of the time in the narrative, is more strongly felt than any other character conceived on the same scale by the novelist in his entire range of literary output.

The Seth, Shyamsunder, is the antagonist in the novel. His villainy has a distinctive identity of its own and without a parallel in any of the writer's other novels. His greed for money surpasses that of the Seths of *So Many Hungers!* and *He Who Rides a Tiger*. There are moments when even Shylock's greed and unscrupulous nature pale into insignificance before him. He is an incarnation of absolute callousness and selfishness. No amount of tears can stop him from his pursuance of

exploitative practices. “Words will melt a ripe coconut, but not the Seth’s heart in its cast iron shell.”⁶

Making money is his prime objective in life. Despite his cool, calculating nature he is very credulous. Any prospect of earning quick money can make him act in the rashest of manner. The folk tales about the Chamundi bridge and a young magician with so called healing powers can be cited as examples of his gullibility which cause him great loss. He falls an easy prey to the strategy of the amulet worked out by Atmaram to save the poor villagers from his evil designs. He is a symbol of hurdles which a newly independent country like India has to cross on its way to becoming a genuine democratic nation. His decision to contest election to the District Board is one of the many ways to exploit and make money. The novel clearly states that India can be saved by defeating such Seths and not by making every one provided with armful of gold. To quote:

“The days of the Seths were numbered. Soon
would the people, vested with their new power
fully waken and their thunderous wrath would
make every tyrant whine for mercy.”⁷

Seth Shyamsunder is frustrated in his aims by the women of the village led by Meera. His defeat signifies the possibility of the defeat of similar Seths by the masses, and hence, Bhattacharya's vision of a glorious future of his country.

The novel is essentially a novel of women. Meera, a young energetic girl of Sonamatti, is at the center of its action. She is representative of the resurgent attitude and love of freedom of Indian women. She has been brilliantly portrayed and has all the qualities of a heroine. She is ebullient, yet generous; unlike many girls of her age, her adolescent aspirations are tempered by her sympathetic outlook on the helpless people around her. She may be an idealist, thinking the miracle of the 'taveez' will materialize, but her idealism is inspired by her sincere wish to rescue the poor and the downtrodden from the evil designs of the Seth. She, like her Grandfather, Atmaram, combines the traditional values and modern attitude towards certain pressing issues like the question about the status of women; the elections in a democratic set up; the illogicality of the Seth's practice of compounding his interests on loans he gives to the villagers; their ultimate ejection from their fields and hearths, etc. She displays her strength of will and kindness by rescuing Nago from the well at the risk of her own life. When ten, she

participated in the Quit India Movement and served a term in jail. She is a moving spirit behind the women's march to the Seth's shop to pressurize him to sell clothes at a fair price. She is aware of the changing times and the need for a woman to assert her rights. She defeats the Seth's plan to deprive women of the pleasure to see the cinema show; she triumphantly says to the Seth:

“We outwitted you.” She hesitated a little. “We had to do it. Equal rights for men and women, that was the song. We had to fight for that song.”⁸

She shows exemplary courage in making her grandfather stand in elections against the Seth. Dauntless, she goes to him to settle the accounts of her grandmother.

Meera is so full of milk of human kindness that she readily decides to acquiesce in the proposal of the Seth to work with him on partnership basis. The Seth is easily taken for a ride by the ploy of Atmaram involving the amulet which is purported to change copper into gold if worn by Meera on the condition that a real act of kindness has to be done by her without knowing it. Atmaram changes the copper ring on Meera's finger with a gold one through Lakshmi's help. Shyamsunder, credulous

as he is, takes the gold ring on Meera's finger as a miracle materialized by the amulet on her arm given by her grandfather. He is immediately tempted to make the most of the amulet. He supplies Meera with a great quantity of copper jewellery to wear and tries to manipulate affairs of the poor villagers who had mortgaged their belongings with him. His manipulation of their affairs is aimed at creating situations where Meera would be compelled to do act of real kindness. But he fails in his successive attempts and in the process incurs losses. It is not until he has squandered away a sizeable portion of his wealth that he realizes that for the amulet to work a miracle, a real act of kindness needs to be done by Meera which should be shorn of any ulterior motive and must be spontaneous. He tries again and is miserably unsuccessful. Chapters 19 to 28 in the novel are concerned with discovering what constitutes the real act of kindness. This process of discovery forms the sub-plot.

The villagers whom Meera intends to help with gold gained through the miracle get impatient with long waiting to see the amulet work its miracle as stated by the minstrel. Many of them get disillusioned with its miraculous properties. Their disillusionment changes into outright aversion for Meera when they misunderstand her pious motive. The Seth's machinations to create an artificial situation to induce Meera

to do an act of kindness results in the unwitting ejection of the Old Father's family from their home. It flares up the indignation of the villagers into fury against her. Some women go to the extent of burning her effigy to get rid of her once and for all. But their attempt is foiled by Meera's friend of the "cow-house".

In the sub-plot of the novel we find the growth in Meera's character. She is repeatedly warned by Sohanlal against her impractical views about acting as a saviour of the people:

"Listen, Meera with your gold you will save
this village. You will save the seven villages.
But there are eight hundred thousand others.
Each has a Seth of its own. Each Seth waits to
snatch the new power from the people. You
cannot have gold enough to save India."⁹

'Gold' is the central symbol in the novel with layers of meanings. It symbolizes material prosperity, spiritual and mental richness. Its material importance cannot be denied because it can be used to eliminate poverty and the related woes of the people. It can also be instrumental in producing spiritual development. In short, gold can ensure both worldly and spiritual freedom of man. In this light the amulet or the touchstone

acquires a new meaning. The touchstone signifies freedom and the freedom can work miracles if people do acts of real kindness with full devotion and spirit of selflessness. To quote:

Freedom was the touchstone ... It was a touchstone for everyone to possess. This touchstone was not enough, for it could wake to life and work its miracle only when acts of faith were done.¹⁰

This work has a sound allegorical structure. Its theme is presented through allegorical symbols and situations. It presents the idea that people must shed their age-old modes of thinking and bias and understand the importance of freedom and the dynamics of a democratic set-up in order to realize better life for themselves. It exhorts us to make conscious efforts to save our newly won freedom which alone is a panacea for the social, political and economic evils in our country. The theme underlines the novelist's persistent concern with human values.

The plot of the novel involves grooming of the people to attain maturity of mind and spirit to handle hard-won freedom from foreign rule. It is at the same time concerned with the greed for pelf and power of the exploiters of society like the Seth. The plot moves forward as a result

of the conflict between the exploiter as represented by Shyamsunder, and the exploited as signified by the poor villagers of Sonamatti. Sonamatti is a microcosmic representation of India; the Seth and “the cow-house five” represent the exploitative class and the resurgent spirit of Indian women respectively. The title of the novel is symbolic of the worship of wealth and the redemptive power of gold in terms of eliminating poverty and miseries of the people. Gold is worshipped as a goddess by the greedy ones. It is also a goddess because it can be used as a great healer. Bhattacharya’s titles are invariably multi-dimensional in meaning. In the novel gold also symbolizes acts of kindness as is evident in the following passage:

Gold in itself has no value. Gold is a strip of field released from bonds. Gold is a new straw thatch on the walls of a mud hut. It is the rag-woman’s escape from hunger and the old father’s wish for a pilgrimage to Holy Benares.¹¹

At a deeper level of meaning, it signifies much more than the precious metal. If it is symbolic of wealth, the root-cause of much social tensions and exploitations, it also symbolizes the idea that a pious selfless deed of

kindness is what matters to alleviate the poor conditions of people more than material wealth.

The structure of the novel is multi-dimensional. At the levels of characters, situations, locales, theme etc. multiplicity of meanings can be deciphered by a discerning reader. The symbolism is further enriched by an artistic juxtaposition of worldliness and saintliness, humor and pathos, kindness and greed, idealism and realism, tradition and modernism. Owing to its rich symbolic structure, the novel is both emotional and rational in appeal. The juxtaposition of these contrarities lends the structure a dramatic quality. All through the narrative a tension is sustained as a result. The novel successfully produces a unity of effect. It abides by the classical unities of place, action, and time which spans a few months in the novel. The place of the action is the village of Sonamatti and the action moves around the amulet.

The amulet inspires people with devotion to its magical power and expectation of gold. The writer adopts a tongue in cheek attitude towards the people's worship of gold like a goddess. He says:

Such madness about gold! A mystic value was
set on the yellow metal, so that there could be a
game for men to play. Whoever gained the

metal, more and yet more, came up on top and
 all bowed to him with palms folded... A man
 was best stated in terms of his gold. A race
 apart from humbler folk; super beings; golden
 gods!¹²

The amulet holds out a promise of boundless wealth for the materialistic people like the Seth. Meera wants to utilize it to alleviate the conditions of her village people with the earnest spirit of selfless devotion.

The novel's presentation of the fusion of idealism, realism and materialism is an artistic triumph. The persistent concern of the novel with the amelioration of the plight of the masses; the materialistic importance of gold as a panacea for so many ills of the people; and the realistic appraisal by Sohanlal about the futility of Meera's efforts "to wipe every tear from every eye" with gold give the novel a humanistic dimension. Sohanlal explains to Meera, "Money poured on people, unearned money. It poured like rain! It would do no good in the long run."¹³ It means that general uplift and happiness of the people is not possible through charitable acts alone; happiness can come only from the fruits of one's labour.

Wealth lies at the very foundation of the structure of the novel. It is around money that the plot revolves. Wealth is linked with the motives of greed and altruism. The Halwai and the Seth represent the former, whereas, Meera the latter motive. The villagers need money to escape the possibility of ejection from their hearth and soil. Money accounts for the tension in the structure of the plot.

The motive of selfless commitment to the cause of the poor is the major structural device in the novel. Meera, her grandmother and Atmaram represent the altruistic force. They are pitted against the exploitative attitude of the Seth and the resultant tension accounts for the dramatic structure of the novel. Though the motive of the mass uplift is not materially realized in the story, the novel gives full-throated expression to the urge of man to translate his dream into reality.

A significant aspect of the thematic structure of the novel is the growth of the consciousness of women. Most of the important characters are females. Their predominant role in the novel is sounded in retrospect when their participation in the Quit India Movement is described. Of their consciousness Gandhism is an important part. They follow the Gandhian ideal of non-violence and Gandhi's precept of good deeds in their struggle against the evil machinations of the Seth. They are further

indoctrinated with Gandhism by Atmaram's sobering influence, "you cannot right one wrong with another. You cannot fight malice with malice"¹⁴ and "Let the Seth have his way. Let him deny the women and in his heart he will suffer. The victory will be yours."¹⁵

The novel fuses together the themes of freedom struggle and Gandhism, and this meeting of the two traditions in Atmaram, a real man of flesh and blood, connects the thematic structure with folklore and folk-mind and gives the novel an epic depth.

The minstrel provides an added depth to the thematic concerns of the novel by his insightful observations on the real nature of freedom. To him freedom has magnetic attraction so long as it appears elusive, but once realized, it imposes a lot of responsibilities and difficulties. It is the duty of the people to make the most of the opportunities which the freedom offers and conscientiously work to uphold it. In the novel Atmaram and Sohanlal are two characters who are never blind to the realities of life. They help in the development of the political awareness of the people of Sonamatti.

The novel is deeply rooted into the ethos of rural India. Faith in miracles has always been an important part of Indian life since times immemorial. The novelist's treatment of the theme of miracle makes the

narrative highly absorbing. This theme has been presented through the amulet episode and further highlighted by the supposed miracle of a talking goat. Initially the miracle associated with the amulet is keenly awaited by the people, but as the plot progresses, the expectations of the people gradually give way to doubt about the veracity of it. Their doubt develops into fury against Meera who has been an unwitting instrument of the ejection of “the old man’s family.” She laments her fate, “It is my fate to wear the “taveez” for one purpose. To be scorned, to be despised, to be scourge of Sonamatti.”¹⁶ Towards the end of the novel the mystery of the miracle is unraveled.

For all its in-built tension and its dramatic structure, the novel achieves real literary quality by its emotional structure which is sustained by human relationships and situations. The love relationships between Lakshami and the Seth; the minstrel and his wife; Masterji and his wife; Sohanlal and Meera; and the emotional bond between the “Cow-house-Five” are important elements which define the novel’s emotional structure. There is another strand of emotions which is produced by the amulet. It is related to the excitement and curiosity linked with it; the expectation of a miracle; the idolization of Meera; the growing mistrust

consequent upon the failure of the amulet to work a miracle; the hatred for Meera; the attempted burning of her effigy, etc.

The plot of the novel is compact. Its action spans a few months in the life of the village of Sonamatti. Its setting is one village except for brief moments of shifting to the neighboring towns where the Seth has his show-rooms. The action revolves around a single character (Meera) for the most part who is the protagonist of the novel. Within its limited compass the action unfolds a story of epic depth by presenting Indian ethos in its multiple manifestations. We read about the woes and wails of the masses, their aspirations and frustrations, their expectations and disappointments, their moments of exultation and tragedy, their toiling in fields and campaigning for elections, their humanistic urges and their demoniac intentions; their traditional moorings and their initiation into a democratic process; and last but not the least, the participation of no less than three generations of people in the action lends the novel an epic dimension. One remarkable feature of the novel is its acting out on physical plane different shades of feeling, thought and motive of characters. Throughout the narrative one cannot miss the feeling of vigorous human activity. This further accounts for the dramatic structure of the plot. The compactness of the plot can be seen in the logical

sequence of its different episodes. If anything, this novel is a fine example of the writer's matured skills in handling technical devices.

The blend of idealism and realism is another important thematic concern of the novel. It is manifest in the characters of Minstrel and Meera very conspicuously. The Minstrel's idealistic stratagem to rescue the village and his realistic perception of the possibilities democracy would throw up for people comprise the blend in a refined artistic manner. Similarly, Meera's unsagging faith in the miracle of the amulet and her understanding of the problems afflicting her villagers mark her out as an embodiment of the fusion of idealism and realism.

The fabric of the novel presents many contrarities of existence. It presents a panoramic view of Indian life lived at the levels of beliefs, traditions, attitudes, social changes, etc. It weaves together the comic and the tragic, the ridiculous and the serious into what may be called an artistic whole. J. P. Tripathi very aptly observes:

The misery, hardships, diseases, and the belief
in superstitions and the supernatural arouse a
feeling of pity and sympathy for the people.
The attempt to ameliorate their plight by gold
achieved through miracle is ridiculous and

arouses a sense of disgust, satire, irony, sarcasm and a sense of genuine laughter are the literary devices to cure the people of their illusions and fairy tale world of superstitions. Tying up of all the copper coins on Meera's person and her movement with a protruding belly and the irritation of grandma (for a moment fearing that she has gone with a child before marriage) are all farcical and humorous. The scene of the marriage between the two egregious fools, the drunk and the prostitute, with the pack of drunkards trying to cheat the deceitful Seth are highly comic and are scenes fit for a theatre rather than novel. Feeding the children of the village with jilebi for inspiring a genuine impulse of kindness in Meera and allowing Sohanlal to descend in the well to save the boy while Buddhu eats jilebi in the latrine are silly, farcical acts. The effort to burn the effigy of Meera also has a humorous undertone.

The ladies procession, their threat to strip themselves are both intensely pathetic and comic.¹⁷

Another noteworthy aspect of the writer's technique is the device of irony. The narrative is interspersed with many instances where the novelist adopts a tongue-in-check stance towards those negative traits in characters and traditions which deserve to be criticized. The satire cannot be missed in the Seth's assertion that he takes interest on the amount given to people only to help them and cannot afford to be lax with regard to his money because it would mean denying Nago, his son, his patrimony. Moreover, Shyamsunder's persistent attempts to induce acts of kindness by Meera are highly ironic in treatment. The novelist has a dig at rich people's materialistic motive behind their acts of worship. The 'taveez' episode in particular contributes to the novel's ironic structure. Till the end of the novel the reader is left guessing about the mystery of the miracle the amulet is supposed to perform. Even the important participants in the action – Meera and the Seth- are ignorant about the reality of it till the end. In no other novel by Bhattacharya has the irony of situation been so artistically executed as in the amulet episode. More importantly, irony is blended with the satirical attitude of the writer

towards social hypocrisy as practiced by the Seth. Irony has been used by the writer as a technical device to create an atmosphere of suspense regarding the mystery of the amulet and to bring home the meaning of it to the characters and readers as a revelation. It heightens the dramatic effect of the plot. It makes the Seth appear utterly ridiculous in his defeat in the end. In a sense, irony has a humorous dimension to it with regard to him. It has enabled the author to treat the villain with a degree of indulgence bordering on comic. At the author's hands irony as a literary device has been exploited to create a distinctive thematic structure.

Finally, a word may be said about the social dimension of its plot. The novel is basically built around female characters in general and Meera in particular. It spiritualizes and intellectualizes women by making them realize their tremendous potential for bringing about socio-political change. It is they and not men who rise in revolt against the evil represented by the age-old institution of the moneylender. The novel's social structure allegorizes growth in the consciousness of women who have been playing, till recently, the second fiddle to men. The feministic bias of the novel sets it apart from Bhattacharya's other works. It will not be surprising if it is hailed as a feministic writing by a male author.

Behind its seeming feminism lies a vision of the role women of free India are expected to play to realize the full meaning of freedom.

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CHAPTER VI

SHADOW FROM LADAKH (1967)

A winner of the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award, *Shadow From Ladakh* belongs to the later stage of Bhattacharya's creative endeavours and deals with the tradition-modernity theme in the context of Indian society. This thematic treatment is more pronounced in this novel than in the earlier novels. Besides its thematic concern it is greatly different from the earlier novels in respect of the technique, linguistic characteristics and stylistic features.

Unlike E .M Forster's *A Passage to India*, *Shadow From Ladakh* pleads for the synthesis of the modern values as represented by the west, and the traditional values as represented by India if our country is to face the challenge of the changing conditions. This blend of the two sets of values also relates to the fusion between materialism and spiritualism; and urbanism and ruralism. As the plot of the novel develops, we are witness to the clash between the traditional and the modern values as evident in the conflict between Steeltown and Gandhigram. Steeltown increasingly assumes importance for the nation's security in view of the Chinese aggression on India. It starts expanding in order to meet the

growing Chinese threat. It becomes necessary that the area occupied by Gandhigram be added to the ever expanding Steeltown. The people of Gandhigram are not willing to acquiesce in the accession of their village to Steeltown. Led by Satyajit Sen, they oppose any expansionist move by Steeltown. Gandhigram thinks that Steeltown has not been able to understand the philosophy for which it stands. Gandhigram is a village modeled on the Gandhian philosophy. It represents the ideals which Gandhiji strove to teach his countryman. It represents a way of life best suitable to Indian ethos. To quote:

The apparently insignificant village was building up a model for the whole of India. The new community was creating a social order in which all were truly equal. All land belonging to the cooperative. Food from the fields distributed according to needs. Other needs met by small industries based locally, economic self-sufficiency was the set aim. There were the weavers who produced on handlooms every yard of the cloth the village consumed. Two blacksmiths forged plowshares, cartwheel-rims,

and the pots and pans the householders needed.

Two men turned sugarcane into jaggery – the brown unrefined jaggery was better than factory made sugar. An artisan made paper out of pulp drawn from certain trees in the adjoining woods. Three men pressed the crop of mustard seed.¹

The people of Gandhigram are dead-set against the establishment of large industries. Satyajit Sen, the main inspirational force in Gandhigram, tries to dissuade Bhaskar Roy, an America-returned engineer, from encroaching upon the territory of his village. But Bhaskar is not at all convinced by Sen. He reasons that for the defence and economic independence of India heavy industrialization is a prerequisite. According to him:

Steel means economic progress. Machine tools, tractors, big industrial plants, locomotives. Steel to fight poverty and hunger. But steel has gained second meaning. It stands for our country's freedom. That is an inescapable fact, not to be changed by wishful thinking.

Development plus defense – a compulsion of
our current history.²

Bhaskar is of the view that Gandhigram is a hindrance in the path of the country's development, and the annexation of it does not tantamount to its economic destruction, it is simply an exchange of one ideology for the other. The ideology for which Gandhigram stands, Bhaskar opines, has no relevance in the present times. He wants its people to be released from self-imposed suffocating code of life. He thinks that once exposed to the modern amenities of life as offered by Steeltown, the people of the village will easily take to the ways of the city, and Gandhigram will lose its identity and become part of Steeltown. He states in no unambiguous terms that even if Steeltown has some seamier side, some vice, it will only lend attraction to life. He explains his perceptions:

“Vice is the darkness that gives value to light.

No darkness, and light is hurtful. Let there be
some virtue, some vice. Let them be
juxtaposed, balanced, ... Virtue and vice
together give life its colour, savour. That's what

I've experienced personally. One without the other could easily destroy us.”³

Bhaskar tries to find a way to defeat Satyajit ideologically. He finally hits upon the idea of fighting him with his own weapon of non-violence. He arranges for the cultural programmes for the villagers with a view to exposing them to the Western concepts of entertainment and many other facilities which only an urban centre can provide. Being a true votary of Gandhian philosophy, Satyajit does not stop the people of Gandhigram from going to see the cultural programmes because this would imply exercising violence. The villagers are impressed by the cultural programmes. They enjoy them and feel the necessity of such cultural interaction between the people of Steeltown and Gandhigram to develop mutual understanding between the two patterns of living and make their lives more meaningful. Gandhiji himself subscribed to this view:

No culture can live if it tries to be exclusive. I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed, I want all cultures to flow freely about my house. Mine is not a religion of the prison house.⁴

Satyajit, a committed Gandhian, also believes in the positive comingling of the traditional values and the modern values. He does appreciate the importance of Steeltown for the country. The synthesis of the modern and the traditional values is the persistent thematic concern of the novel; all its major characters endorse this synthesis. They all play an active part to bring home the theme loud and clear. The artistry involved in their characterization brings home the novel's central idea. Suruchi, the wife of Satyajit, too accepts the value of a creative synthesis of the western and the eastern values for her country. Bhattacharya writes about her:

True that she had not accepted Gandhigram in its entirety. But she had not rejected it either, or else the current threat to existence would not have been so hard to bear. She would even have welcomed it with arms extended – it could easily mean a new understanding with her husband, and the old relationship recaptured.⁵

She takes exception to Gandhigram's tradition-ridden life style. She sees no justification in continuing with its obsolete values and blind following of conventions; she values synthesis and feels:

There was one way left for Gandhigram. It must make readjustments. That would mean acceptance of life in its totality. But not the Steeltown way; that also was denial of life deep under the surface. Let license be chastened by restraint. Let restraint find its right level by a leavening of freedom.⁶

When Satyajit meets Dalai Lama, he expresses his cosmopolitan view of things which indicates his concern with the integration of values.

He says:

“What has alienated us from Tibetan way of life is the semifeudal pattern of society. A relic of the old world cannot lie within the shell of the new; under the hard pressure it is bound to be crushed into pulp.”⁷

Similarly, Sumita, Satyajit’s daughter, appreciates the importance of modern amenities of life like electricity. She even tries to know more about it. Bhaskar remarks about her:

“The ease with which she could resolve all contradictions in her mind. Machines were the

enemy. Yet she was fascinated by the very life spark - electricity. The life spark, the energy that had begotten the new century, the new civilization.”⁸

Even the arch antagonist, Bhaskar, in due course of time, begins to shed his aversion towards Gandhigram. His experiences with the hapless Chinese children and Sumita widen his horizon of consciousness to comprehend the significance of the ideals which Gandhigram stands for. The writer says, “A new insight had come – he had begun to understand Satyajit. Some of the things he stood for.”⁹

Bireswar Bose, an M. P. and close friend of Bhaskar since their University days, represents a healthy cosmopolitan attitude. He understands the value of both Steeltown and Gandhigram. He views them as equally important for the progress and for protecting the cultural ethos of the country. To him they mutually sustain each other, one cannot exist without the other.

The development of the plot of the novel is based on the conflict between the two value systems. But each important character presents a potential for development by making adjustments with the changing situations, by embracing different elements with the changing conditions

and by incorporating diverse values. Bhaskar Roy exhibits a peculiar blend of the western and the eastern values. Though having lived and graduated in America and followed the 'liberal' way of life, he is never able to distance himself from his Indian roots. He gives up his job of an engineer in America as soon as an opportunity arises for him to come back to India. Bhattacharya writes about him:

He absorbed America with all his senses. Not know-how alone. He absorbed much of the human scene. He drank hard with the men. He dated with the women. He was now very far from his homeland, in something other than mileage. Yet it could be that within him India remained as real as ever before, that, may be, was the reason why, even after a stay of twelve years, he could cut the strong pull of America all at once and fly back home.¹⁰

Bhaskar admires the scientific culture of the West. He is keen to contribute towards his country's development with his technical know-how. He looks towards India for moral and human values. His preference for Sumita and not Rupa is indicative of his deep-seated attachment for

spiritual India. In his union with Sumita the novel represents the theme of synthesis of diverse values.

A tradition-bred girl like Sumita, whose unusual simplicity of dress and attitude strikes Bhaskar, is influenced by the values of urban society. At the Meadow House function she feels compelled to review herself, her simple dress. Soon she 'changes' herself. She emerges as a reoriented person having a broad sympathy for the best in city life. Satyajit and Suruchi as a married couple symbolize a fusion of the modern and traditional values. Their inability to adhere to the life of strict celibacy and asceticism testifies to their final realization of the importance of not only the spiritual but also the worldly demands of life. In a moment of candid self-revelation Satyajit admits before his wife:

"I will have everything that you condescend to give me, Ruchi." Surprised by his easy acquiescence, she cried, "Condescend: Why do you say that?" All these years I have deserved nothing from you and yet my demands have been limitless. At last I see it all with clear sight."¹¹

Thus released from his self-imposed asceticism, Satyajit begins to view her as an essential part of his life that has been denied the basic biological pleasure for long. Suruchi on her part too feels that though denied physical fulfilment by her husband all these years, she has gained much spiritually. She wants him to combine the ascetic and the worldly in him. In the words of the writer:

She would like her husband to be Satyajit in
one part of his being and someone else in
another. That some else – it was Bireswar!¹²

The friendship between Satyajit and Bireswar also symbolizes the possibility of mutual accommodation of the traditional and the materialistic values. These two friends are poles apart in attitude and perception of things. Whereas Satyajit is an idealist, Bireswar is a practical modern person not averse to enjoying pleasures of life. He says, “I have few inhibitions and fewer moral scruples. I firmly believe in getting what I need.”¹³

The conflict between Steeltown and Gandhigram is resolved towards the end of the novel. When Satyajit’s negotiation with the people at the helm of affairs in Delhi and his proposed peace-march fail, he decides to go on fast unto death in order to save Gandhigram from

encroachment by Steeltown. The workers of the Steeltown become furious at learning about his fast since he is held in high esteem by all irrespective of their ideological persuasions. Bhaskar gives up the plan to engulf the village. He tries to realize his dream of bridging the gap between Steeltown and Gandhigram. He joins the procession of the workers and even leads it to persuade Satyajit to break his fast. He urges the procession to always adhere to the principles for which Gandhigram stands:

“One thing I must ask of you. Don’t move away from Gandhigram – after the passion of the moment is spent. You will have to be with these people, always. Try to see what they stand for. Give them chance to understand what we are striving to attain.”¹⁴

Bhattacharya’s treatment of the theme of synthesis of diverse values in his earlier novels has been of a secondary nature, but it is the primary concern of *Shadow From Laddakh*. It has been clearly sounded in the novel:

Let license be chastened by restraint. Let restraint find its right level by a leavening of

freedom. Let there be a meeting ground of the
two extremes; let each shed some of its content
yet remain true to itself.¹⁵

Thus the novel ends on a note of compromise between sheer materialistic industrialism and austere life-style as symbolized by Gandhigram. It seems to be the only viable option left for a developing country like India which has a long tradition of religio-cultural diversity.

The novel is set in that period of time in Indian history when China invaded India. The writer, deeply influenced as he is by Gandhian and Tagorian ideas of non-violence and brotherhood of mankind, makes a fervent plea for the resolution of tension between the two countries and restoration of amicable relationship. Satyajit is one significant character who voices this idea. He tells his wife about his concern for the peaceful coexistence of the two neighbouring nations as they always had cordial relations between them in the past. To substantiate his point he gives a reference to Tagore's undying interest in China:

“Anxious to revive the old cultural link, he
(Tagore) visited China forty years ago, at a time
when the world had nothing but scorn for that
country. He even set up in his university a chair

of Chinese Culture. A library of a hundred thousand Chinese volumes. A visiting professor from Canton.”¹⁶

The possibility of coming closer of the two peoples is hinted at by the Chinese girl, Erk-ku Roy. She becomes intimate with the Indians at a time when the tension between India and China escalates. This girl understands her Indian acquaintances well and shows attachment for them like Satyajit, Suruchi and Bhaskar, though she loves her national leader, Mao. Her love and respect for Gandhiji is equally true. Among her small possessions are a picture of Mao and a spinning-wheel of Gandhiji. In the departure of the Chinese children from Indian soil in safety the theme of brotherhood of Indo-Chinese people has been clearly sounded. To quote:

Ah To, before he stepped into the waiting cab,
turned warmly to Bhaskar, and the barriers
between them ceased to count as his hands
drew together in an Indian Salute.¹⁷

The novel epitomizes the writer's concept of synthesis of diverse values. Synthesis does not mean negation of any system of values, but assertion of it by buttressing it with positive aspects of the other system. Since no

one system made by man is complete in all respects, every system needs to sustain itself through incorporating certain elements from diverse sources. This thematic concern is all the more relevant in the Indian context given India's multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual social structure, and its trying to come to terms with the reality of colonization and its fallouts and increasing global tendency towards shrinking of the geographical boundaries of all nations. It is to these realities which stare in the face of every country that Bhattacharya responds with his literary sensitivity. The novel reflects what constitutes Indian reality.

The plot of the novel is related to a well defined time-scheme. Its structure is conditioned by time. It has a linear structure, though there are a few flashbacks. They describe Satyajit's stay at Shantiniketan and Cambridge and his education and marriage with Suruchi. The Chinese invasion of India in 1962 forms the context within which the whole drama is enacted. The structure of the novel is based on its symbolism which signifies the conflict between two value-systems and finally their synthesis. The sequence of events has been chronologically presented, and conflicting ideas and historical forces symbolically described by giving them a human habitation. The development of the plot is based on

the confrontation between Gandhigram and Steeltown which culminates in the acceptance of opposite views by the champions of the two systems.

When the structure of the novel is studied in relation to its major characters we notice a common pattern of development. Satyajit, initially a die-hard advocate of the values of his village to the exclusion of any non-Gandhian influences, is seen to be gradually softening his stand as things happen. He begins to realize the significance of the constructive values of the western world for the safety and progress of a newly independent and developing country. The change in him is also evident in his tacit condonation of sartorial changes in his daughter, Sumita, an alter-ego of his. He also realizes his unforgivable folly in having denied to himself and his wife, Suruchi, the right of basic marital pleasures for long. He understands that healthy life can only be lived if one satisfies not only the spiritual craving but also the physical urge. As time passes he matures politically also. When he fails to enlist volunteers from across the country for his proposed peace-march, he altogether abandons his plan of peace-march with a handful of followers. He knows well the inefficacy of such a step vis-à-vis an enemy who knows no language of peaceful protest and whose humanity has dried-up. He understands that Gandhiji's weapon of non-violence can be effective under certain

conditions. Unless the enemy has some kindness and humanity in him, one cannot expect the policy of non-violence to succeed. When we study the structure of the novel in relation to his character, we find a linear structure corresponding to the development of him.

The next consequential character, Bhaskar Roy, registers similar growth. Through the course of the narrative he is seen to be softening his stand on the question of Gandhigram. He begins to realize the importance of the values it stands for and the impossibility of erasing its ethos which is closer to India of the masses than the modernistic, industrial values of Steeltown. He realizes Gandhigram is not incompatible with Steeltown. In fact, they can be mutually sustaining in the context of the expedients of fast changing times. His changed attitude towards Gandhigram can also be seen in his admiration and attraction for Sumita's tradition-bound simplicity. His final conciliatory move in leading the procession of workers to persuade Satyajit break his fast unto death confirms his growth as a character.

By the same token, Sunita comes out of her straightjacket of traditions with a girl of widened horizon of consciousness. She appreciates the value of the Steeltown for the defence and progress of her country. Her association with Bhaskar triggers her feminine emotions.

Before her coming into his contact she has been living a life of austerity, oblivious of the woman in her. She realizes her identity as a woman who has desires, dreams to be fulfilled. Her becoming conscious about the erotic sculpture in the temple is indicative of her new self-awareness. Her taking to colourful dress is again suggestive of change in her who now refuses to follow the life of self-imposed denial as taught by her father. She is instrumental in softening of Bhaskar's stance vis-à-vis Gandhigram. Through her contact he learns the principles and vision Gandhigram stands for, and as a result, develops sympathetic attitude towards it.

In the novel Gandhigram emerges as a place not impervious to the wind of change coming from the side of the Steeltown. It is symbolic of rural India by and large. In the opening chapters of the novel it is shown as living in strict conformity to a set of rules as worked out by Satyajit in the spirit of a true Gandhian. It refuses to adapt to any change before its interaction with the Steeltown.

The novel may be construed as a serious attempt by the author to explore the viability of the Gandhian philosophy in the context of post independent India and new expedients of a changing world. The author's view emerging towards the end of the novel may be described as very

pragmatic and realistic. It is the fusion of the Gandhian philosophy and a healthy dose of industrialization that alone can ensure India's survival as a nation.

Shadow From Ladakh can best be described as a novel of ideas. It is based upon the conflict between Gandhian philosophy and Nehruvian way of life. The ideational range of the novel has been narrowed down by the fact that it does not include other dominant ideologies in vogue in modern India, both secular and non-secular. This novel stands out from the rest of his works by virtue of the artistry involved in giving concrete forms to ideas and issues to a degree not seen in the writer's other novels. Be it the task of expressing the impracticability of Gandhian idea of celibacy as described through Satyajit- Suruchi relationship or repressive gender-seclusion as brought out by the defiance of traditional values by Jhanak, Bhattacharya's penmanship is admirable.

At the structural level the conflict between Gandhigram and the Iron town allegorizes Gandhian-Nehruvian dialectics. In terms of symbolism this book does not present any challenge of comprehension. Of all his novels it is most readily amenable to interpretations. This accounts for its being the most structurally simple novel by the writer.

Like *So Many Hungers!* it is set in a crucial period in the history of modern India. In *So Many Hungers!* it is the famine of the 1940s in Bengal and in this novel it is the threat to India's security and integrity in the face of Chinese aggression of 1962 which form the backdrops. *Shadow From Ladakh* has a climactic beginning like the Greek tragedies. The crisis in the life of the nation has been sufficiently described in the opening pages so as to impress upon the reader the gravity of the situation. The meaning of the title becomes clear much before the completion of the book. The title hints at the topicality of the problems involved. Whereas the action of *Dream in Hawaii* is mainly set in Hawaii, the action *Shadow From Ladakh* is not directly set in the region referred to in the title, but the ominous associations of Ladakh are always alive in our minds as we read through the novel.

An important technical departure in *Shadow From Ladakh* from other novels by Bhattacharya is his weaving into its fabric different events in the life of Gandhiji which constituted the turning points in his experiments with truth. It effectively foregrounds Gandhian philosophy by presenting a historical perspective on Gandhiji's life. The external threat to the country's security is used as a context to explore the viability of Gandhian and Nehruvian philosophies. Different characters

representing different ideas are the means to develop the dialectics between the two predominant philosophic streams. By giving human habitation to ideas and using the uncertain circumstances of India's security as a contextual framework the novel is tilted towards being a novel of characters more than a novel of situation.

As compared to other novels by the author, *Shadow From Ladakh* abounds in the political and historical information about India. It contains passages on such topics as India's policy of peaceful coexistence (Panch-Sheel), India's relationship with its neighbours, the idea behind the establishment of Shantiniketan, etc. All this helps the reader, foreign reader in particular, to get nearer to the pulse of real India. This technique might have been employed by the author with a view to reaching the international readership.

Closely related to the foregoing discussion on Bhattacharys's techniques employed in this novel is the question relating to the creative process involved here. For all his innovative skills one gets the impression of the writer's preconceived design which he seems to be pursuing through the novel. If there is anything conspicuously missing it is his spontaneous creativity. In other words, in this novel the intensity of creative process is weak. The novel gives us an impression of too much

of symmetrical patterning, and too much of conscious 'Sadharanikarna' in characterization and incidence.

In delineating characters in this novel Bhattacharya's creativity appears stilted and fails to strike us as being spontaneous. At the most, the characters are symbolic of ideas. The movement of the plot too is aesthetically not satisfying. The plot has a linear predictable movement.

Linguistically, Bhattacharya's *Shadow From Ladakh* shows greater maturity and refinement than his earlier novels. His language is marked by metaphorical expressions which impart a measure of poetic quality to his prose. His earlier works present numerous instances of the employment of metaphors and similes, but they do not appear spontaneous; they are the coinages of a writer trying to come to grips with the daunting task of expressing Indian sensibilities through a foreign medium.

In *Music for Mohini* a plethora of metaphorical expressions does not redeem the stylized effects of the language. But *Shadow From Ladakh* confirms Bhattacharya's reputation as a writer in full command over his medium, equipped with that rare felicity of expression which comes only after a long process of evolution. The metaphors employed here are not only appropriate, but highly evocative and emotive. They

also serve to convey his perception of life, characters, places and events.

Describing Bhaskar in *Shadow From Ladakh*, he writes:

In the years past he had gone from experience to experience, all inhibitions cast aside, as free in feelings as a Western man, and it had been worthwhile indeed. But after a time a queer discontent had come. He was, he thought, journeying from exhaustion to exhaustion. Moments that lived briefly, futilely mounting from day to day, year to year. It was as though he had been scribbling on sheet of paper with a pen dipped in clear water --- the curious image came to his mind--- the water dried and words were gone.¹⁸

The language in this novel matches the seriousness of its action. Even the factual description of places and situation are charged with genuine humanistic concern. With lordly ease Bhattacharya displays the rare quality of presenting abstract ideas in concrete terms.

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CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Though a contemporary of Anand, Narayan and Raja Rao, Bhattacharya's emergence on the literary scene was rather late. But his fame as a literary artist has not suffered on this count. His success is explained by his uncanny ability to render such archetypal motifs in his fiction as characterize great literature. The motifs of quest for food, Man-Woman relationship, Indian Dream of Golden Age, International Understanding, East-West encounter, etc. figure conspicuously in his works.

Closely related to the theme of Quest for food, the image of hunger as drawn by him deserves special attention. *So Many Hungers!* is a compelling novel depicting human misery, frustration, dehumanization and utter helplessness in a highly emotive manner. The beauty of the novel lies not in the direct denunciatory statement against the British inhuman policies during the world war II, but in the implied condemnation through the description of heart-rending scenes of destruction all around. In the novel the image of hunger has been depicted in its multitudinous aspects. The writer seems to have probed

the very core of man's existence. The novel's two-dimensional plot emphasizes Bhattacharya's earnest concern with the idea of fusion of such contrarities as Modernity and Tradition, Materialism and Spiritualism; degradation of humanity and nobility of soul.

The structure of the plot of *So Many Hungers!* has a direct relationship with time. Every development in the novel is rooted into its time. The progression of events can be seen within the perspective of discernible time sequence which accounts for the compactness of the plot. The novel adopts the omniscient, third person narration. Though there are occasional flashbacks, they serve to provide some additional facts. The writer has very effectively handled the two strands of the plot and we do not feel the intrusion by the author. He abstains himself, unlike Thackeray, from giving his authorial comments or views. The development of the plot is the result of his spontaneous creativity; he is no conscious artist in this regard. The plot develops as naturally as characters and situations. The plot assumes its shape through the characters, their interactions, the situations they confront. The characters are delineated as they grow; their growth is natural. They exhibit changes which condition the structure of the plot and themes are expounded with its development of the plot. In most of the modern novels the theme is

novels the theme is not expounded in a logical continuous narrative or with the structural development of the plot. Despite being his first novel, *So Many Hungers!* is certainly Bhattacharya's great technical achievement.

Like many Indo-Anglian novelists, Bhattacharya too has treated the theme of Indian Dream of Golden Age. His treatment of this theme is more exhaustive than any of his compatriots with the sole exception of Mulk Raj Anand. But Bhattacharya has an edge over Anand with regard to the artistry involved in expressing it. His novels are expressive of this vision. The novels *So Many Hungers!*; *He Who Rides a Tiger*, and *Music For Mohini* are significant in this regard. His articulation of the aspirations of a third world country like India makes him very popular with the people in the developing world whose experiences are so similar to those of Indians.

Though there are many points of thematic similarities between *He Who Rides a Tiger* and *So Many Hungers!*, the former is no rehash of the latter. *He Who Rides a Tiger* is the writer's best novel. It exhibits a perfect co-relation between its thematic concerns and the irony of its structure. Its plot is woven round the search of identity of its protagonist, Kalo. Kalo is motivated by a powerful

urge to take revenge on an unjust social system that has sanctioned inhuman caste-hierarchy in Indian society for ages. His assumption of a *Brahminical* role dominates the action and thus explains its ironic structure. Kalo's character is a specimen of high level of artistic skill. If anything, his character shows consistent development throughout the novel. By the time it ends, he emerges as an individual and a type at the same time. As an individual he assumes timeless dimension and as a type he represents the aspirations of his age. The in-built tension in the action increasingly reaches its climax when he makes public confession of his birth. The confession frees him and his daughter from the pangs of self-imposed deception. Through this act he destroys both the tiger he has been riding and the age-old belief in caste sanctity.

The novel comprehends many issues relevant to our society and age. It addresses many moral questions the society is faced with. It presents an essentially moral vision. The beauty of the novel is derived from the irony of its structure. It uses a façade to mount a scathing attack on the evils of caste system.

Music For Mohini presents the conflict between the East and the West. The novel seeks to advocate a healthy fusion of the two cultures as a panacea for many ills a newly independent country is grappling with and

presents the author's vision of modern India. It employs the technique of symbolism to explore the theme of East-West encounter which could not have been better treated through any other technique. This symbolism operates at multiple levels. Be it characters or settings or themes or actions, every conceivable element in the novel gives out layers of meanings. It bears an unmistakable mark of his genius in interpreting Indian consciousness. It pleads for a constructive change in Indian society.

The characterization in the novel scores far less than its plot. Its characters owe their existence to the situations. Though it is a novel of plot, its plot is far from being architectonically satisfying; it is weak. The novel fails to explore the relationship between different characters. It does not have sufficient action which could explain the meaning of its title. It fails to evoke the reader's curiosity about the coming developments. At most we can describe the book as a novel of tension. The tension can be discerned between individuals; between places; between value-systems; etc. It is finally resolved at the end of the story. The resolution does not strike as a natural outcome of the preceding developments. It is a contrived ending at the cost of aesthetic pleasure. The writer seems to rush through the events towards a pre-conceived

resolution. The artistic maturity promised by *So Many Hungers!* is conspicuously missing here.

His fourth novel, *A Goddess Named Gold*, may be called a novel of women. It presents female characters whose courage and determination free a village from the evil designs of a villain--- the money-lender. It is set against the backdrop of a pre-independent Indian village. It presents woman as a dynamic force in society who has the potentialities to engineer radical social changes. It intellectualizes and spiritualizes Indian womanhood. The treatment of the theme of exploitation of the poor by the rich is quite modern in the sense that a new understanding of Indian village life is seen in the novel. It also deals with the theme of independence like many other Indian novels. Gold in the novel is charged with symbolic meanings; if at one level it means pelf and power, at a different level it stands for the richness of human spirit.

The novel has a main plot and a sub-plot. Both the plots have been artistically integrated. The main plot centres round Meera and other villagers who struggle against the greedy Seth. The sub-plot is related to the amulet-episode. Each plot has the structure of tension and develops as the conflict between the exploiter and the exploited escalates. The structure is charged with symbolic values. The meanings of its characters,

places, situations, etc. operate at many levels. Irony is one of the important structural devices in the novel. The author adopts a tongue-in-check attitude towards unsavoury aspects of Indian life. The Seth's repeated attempts at creating artificial pretexts for acts of kindness by Meera are highly ironic. The amulet episode particularly accounts for the ironic structure of the plot. No other novel by Bhattacharya can be compared to this novel with regard to such a masterly handling of the device of irony. It has also been used here as a technique to sustain suspense and to reveal the meaning of amulet suddenly towards the end. It also intensifies the plot's dramatic effect and brings into full focus the total defeat of the villain. It also contributes towards humour in the novel. The Seth's defeat is tinged with ridicule due to the irony of situation. The novel's amulet episode, which is its sub-plot, is a veritable piece of high degree of literary craftsmanship. We cannot conceive of its plot without it.

Shadow From Ladakh (1967) represents the later stage of Bhattacharya's creativity. Its main thematic thrust is tradition-modernity encounter which is more conspicuous here than in his earlier works. Besides, its technique and linguistic features are also greatly different from them. It pleads for the synthesis of the best in tradition and

modernity for the progress of our country. The plot's development depends upon the conflict between the two opposite value-systems. The development of the plot is correlated with the development of its characters. The final resolution of the conflict is the result of mature perception of its characters towards the end. They manifest a spirit of adjustment with the changing conditions.

The novel presents the conflict between Gandhianism and Industrialism. It has a deep philosophical orientation and explores the relevance of these contrary views to Indian society and its existence. It is another novel with a forced ending. The compromise between these opposite philosophies as arrived at towards the end has not been artistically managed. It may be called a poor ending to what promised to be a high voltage drama. The sudden change of hearts of its principal actors – Satyajit and Bhaskar-- does not appear to be convincing. The reader's curiosity is abruptly deflated by the author. No wonder, the book has not been a favourite with reviewers.

The protagonist, Satyajit, for all his Gandhian austerity and spiritual leanings, lacks that human dimension which Kalo of *He Who Rides a Tiger* possesses. Satyajit's austerity is voluntary in nature, but Kalo's hardships are the result of an age-old inhuman social system.

Satyajit lives by a particular philosophy, but Kalo propounds a philosophy shaking a social structure to its foundations.

The plot of the novel on the whole is anything but compact. Certain events and minor characters do not fit well into the scheme of things. One wonders if it really deserves the Sahitya Academy Award. We cannot think of a book winning the prestigious award merely on the basis of its thematic content alone, ignoring its technical aspects. This novel seems to be a product of the writer's response to the material compulsions of the changing times which seem to question the relevance of the traditional Indian values and habits of mind as epitomized by Gandhism to which Bhattacharya owes strong allegiance. All he succeeds in doing is to present his idea of confluence of the materialistic values of the West and the spiritual values of the East as a panacea for the socio-political ills plaguing the country. The work fails to match its thematic concerns with a high order of technical craftsmanship.

Bhattacharya is an articulator of the consciousness of modern India. His themes are expressive of the nation's aspirations, predicaments, strengths and weaknesses. What merits particular attention are his principles of structuring and fictional technique. Before making any final judgement on his art one may concede the fact that he wrote at a

time when Indo-Anglian fiction was in its comparatively early stages and the potentialities of English language as a means to express Indian sensibilities were largely unexploited. Any literary attempt by an Indian writer was looked down upon with suspicion by foreign critics.

An important aspect of his structural technique is his uncanny ability to take an event and make it a context to explore thematic concerns and characters. He highlights the significance of a particular event at national and personal levels. He exhibits this technique in *So Many Hungers!* which has the Bengal famine as its context. That event is projected onto our consciousness and made more than a context within which the writer treats different kinds of hunger like hunger for wealth, fame, maternal bliss, sex, etc. Similarly, the Chinese aggression of India in 1962 is portrayed in *Shadow From Ladakh* as an occasion to debate the viability of Gandhian and Nehruvian philosophies. The immediacy of the context lends a high degree of realism to his novels and makes the beginnings climactic. It compels attention and sustains our interests. Bhattacharya has been justifiably described as a great chronicler of modern India. At times it becomes difficult for the reader to decide where the chronicler begins and where the artist ends. The writer's dual presence both in the capacity of an artist and a historian can be seen in

virtually all his fictional works. An important fact of his creative process is that the intensity of fusion is not as high as genuine literary classics possess. The reason is not difficult to seek. Bhattacharya's orientation towards novels of ideas, of purpose, deprives him of the intensity of artistic creativity.

His tendency to settle for simplistic romantic solutions to the problems in his novels makes him appear less spontaneous as a writer. this explains why his interpretation of life does not entitle him to be bracketed with the masters of fiction like Dostoyesky, Balzac, Tolstoy, Flaubert, etc

An important aspect of Bhattacharya's technique is his quality of distancing himself from his narrative despite his being an avowed novelist of ideas. He never intrudes into the narrative to express his views on any issue. The plot develops on the basis of interaction between characters, their responses in different situations, etc. The development of plot is smooth . His use of the device of flashback does not hinder our comprehension of the narrative. As compared to modern novelists like Conrad who frequently employs flashback and poses a difficulty of understanding, Bhattacharya is much easier to understand. One possible reason for this difference between the two may be found in the intensity,

depth, and complexity with which Conrad delineates his characters. Conrad's difficult technique may have been necessitated by high standards he sets himself for characterization which belongs to the realms of psychological realism. Consequently, his plots are not time-bound. Bhattacharya, on the other hand, is conventional in this regard.

An important point of departure in Bhattacharya from most of the Indo-Anglian fiction writers is his refusal to employ first person point of view; he favours omniscient point of view which suits him for his plot design and characterization. It helps him reveal as much facts about a character as he deems fit to condition our response or opinion about that character, for example, in *He Who Rides A Tiger* we get to know more about Bitten's character, his background, etc. much later though he is introduced quite early in the novel. It is also an effective device to create suspense in the mind of the reader. His plot is chronologically linear, but at times the narrative moves backwards in time through association of ideas. This technique reveals a character's state of mind. This is evidenced in *Music For Mohini* when the heroine learns about a secret love-letter Khuki receives from her admirer and she (Mohini) reminisces about a similar incident involving her classmate, Reba. Through the technique of association of ideas we are given an insight into Mohini's

romantic nature. In *Shadow From Ladakh* the technique has been employed to foreground one of its thematic strands—Gandhism. During the crisis of Chinese aggression Satyajit contemplates taking out a Peace Mission to Ladakh as a true Gandhian. As he thinks about it his mind unfolds some major incidents in Gandhiji's life.

Bhattacharya has a rare quality of summarizing vast details in limited words. It helps him slide from one description to another with ease. In *Shadow From Ladakh* he moves with lordly ease from the description of Gandhigram, its history to an account of Satyajit's life. Nowhere do we find the fabric of the narrative fractured. But when he writes long paragraphs to give historical facts, the narrative tends to slow down. Bhattacharya is a past master of the art of pacing the narrative; his narratives do not run at a constant speed; he changes their movement according to the effects he intends to produce. The narrative of *He Who Rides A Tiger* gains in speed as the novel approaches its end. Following Lekha's decision to marry Motichand under pressure, Kalo decides to disclose his reality to the masses. The climax is reached with astonishing rapidity and the effects are simply spell-binding.

Bhattacharya's use of wit and humour enlivens the narrative and makes the treatment of even the most commonplace themes highly absorbing. He humorously presents prevalent superstitious beliefs and practices in Indian society. In *A Goddess Named Gold* the Seth's fear of a ghost has been humorously described with gusto :

For the dead thought came that the bhootni, expelled from its roost, might take possession of him by way of revenge. He could see his plight. Like the peasant girl he would shriek with wild laughter, shed tears, speak dirty words—he could foretell what he would say .He might even take off his dhoti in public.

In the final analysis, Bhattacharya is a major Indo-Anglian writer with a wide range of literary devices which he employs innovatively. Though essentially a conventional artist, his contributions towards the development of Indo-Anglian fiction can never be doubted. He has carved out a permanent niche for himself in the ever- widening field of Indian fiction.

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